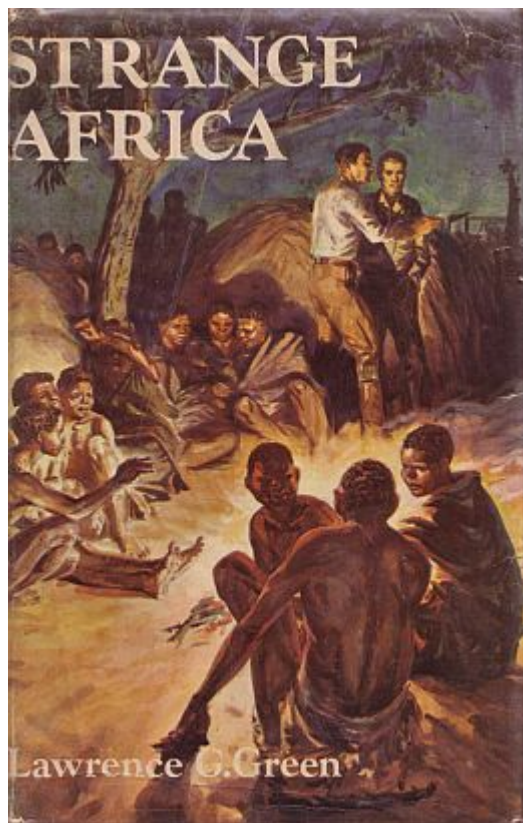


STRANGE AFRICA

Lawrence G. Green



STRANGE AFRICA

By

Lawrence G. GREEN

Howard Timmins Cape Town

CONTENTS

	Foreword		
1	Bow and arrow men	17	Strange waterfront
2	Hermits of the Kalahari	18	Vikings of the Indian ocean
3	Along the dusty river	19	Zanzibar
4	The loneliest white settlement		Index
5	Grim desert cavalcade		
6	Southern lights		
7	Diamonds-and dogs		
8	In African waters		
9	Men against beasts		
10	Fleets inland		
11	Hot frontiers		
12	Fire on the mountain		
13	Islands offshore		
14	The lion hunters		
15	Pans of south Africa		
16	Water for the wilderness		

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Digging the university of Cape Town's motor truck out of heavy sand. There were always difficulties, but the expedition always got through.

The author and old Abraham, leader of the last of the Cape Bushmen.

A Kalahari trader purchasing leopard and other wild animal skins from a native hunter.

A fine kaross of wildcat skins.

The last police post on the eastern border of South-West Africa. Members of the expedition at Sandfontein, just before driving into the desert.

The German hermit of the Kalahari.

Bechuanaland native hunter carrying a muzzle loading blunderbuss.

Camel patrol. A Bechuanaland protectorate police trooper sets out into the desert, fully equipped.

A water-hole in the dry bed of the Nossob river, used by the half-castes.

A camp on the Nossob river.

Author and Titus Matthys, leader of the Nossob river half-castes. Titus had shot more than 50 lions and 80 leopards.

The author in the Kalahari after a springbok hunt.

The university of Cape Town expedition reaches the beacon at union's end. A lonely spot where the Union of South Africa

meets the Bechuanaland
Protectorate and South-West
Africa.

Ice in the Kalahari. Members of
the University of Cape Town
Expedition demonstrate how
cold the desert can be at night in
the winter.

Cutting up an ostrich shot by the
author.

Herero women drawing water at
Sehitwa. Note the Victorian
fashions, still popular among
these strange exiles.

Water tank pierced by bullets at an
old German outpost in the
Kalahari. Visited by the author.

The lighthouse at Port Nolloth.

Roman rock lighthouse. Showing
how the men of the service

climb up to inspect the
automatic light.

Rough diamonds on the sorting
table at Kimberley.

A guard dog tackles a “diamond
raider”. A scene at the training
station at Kimberley.

Young alsatians at training station
where dogs are taught to guard
the Kimberley diamond fields.

Diamond diggers at work on the
Vaal River.

A diamond-washing machine on
the Vaal river.

“Half Mens” trees.

A seven-foot “Half Mens” which
may be hundreds of years old.

The table mountain fire on
Christmas day, 1935.

Beaches of table bay after the fire.

Lions which were shot in the main
street at Broken Hill, Northern
Rhodesia.

Finest natural aerodrome in the
world.

A bombay dhow in harbour.

A clove plantation in Pemba.

A coconut grove in Pemba.

White-gowned Swahilis stride past
the Zanzibar fruit market.

Where the people of Zanzibar buy
their vegetables.

The sultan's palace on the
Zanzibar waterfront.

A narrow street in the bazaar at
Zanzibar.

A Zanzibar doorway with heavy
brass spikes to resist elephants.

The ancient tortoise on Prison
Island.

In the cemetery on Grave Island.

George Washington, the guide,
reveals one of the famous carved
doorways of Zanzibar.

FOREWORD

THE first photograph in this book shows the author in his shooting kit with his rifle on his arm. (No, *not* the genial old bandit on the right.) I have only to look at it to be stirred by memories, to recall the days I spent with him on shooting expeditions in the South African veld. Lord, what days those were! It was Laurie Green who organised the expeditions, it was Laurie Green who got me out of bed in the mornings, it was Laurie Green who led me to the game, and, alas, it was Laurie Green who shot most of it! And afterwards it was Lawrence G. Green, author and connoisseur of wines, who conjured from the resources of a country hotel, in the hinterland of South Africa, dinners that are for ever memorable. You may have met Mr. Green in London, Paris or New York;

you may know him as the author and traveller. But I have the inestimable advantage of having seen him in the South African setting, wearing his famous seven-league boots, to which no photograph ever quite does justice. Mr. Green is the only gourmet I have ever met who could walk twenty-five miles over rough going between breakfast and the hour of “sundowners!”

If I have a special affection for the African reminiscences which he gives you in this book it is because I heard many of them as after-dinner tales, told by a man who had seen what he was describing. Africa is not a country which you can “explore” from the window of a train – a fact that may explain the hideous inaccuracy of much that is written about it. In a bachelor mess which I once inhabited

for a time the members used to subscribe for novels which they saw advertised as having "an African setting" and read them aloud. Nothing I have heard since has sounded half as funny as some of those tales of "mammy-palaver," empty whisky bottles, hashish and man-eating gorillas. Today, however, magazine editors and publishers are losing their innocence and the African Ananias, having beaten a retreat from big-game hunting, seems to be making a last stand in the ranks of the Foreign Legion. How he must regret the old days when he was King of the Elephants in the Kalahari Desert and camels tottered beneath the weight of his "fan mail."

I feel that the great merit of Mr. Green's book is that he has seen and experienced practically everything of

which he writes. The restless urge that has made him "travel hopefully" for so many years has taken him into almost every corner of Africa, and undoubtedly he has the knack of turning up just when something is happening. Today he has the reputation of being a specialist on Africa. From the Congo to Cape Town the phrase is : "If Laurie Green says so-it's all right." And in this case, believe me, it is all right.

A. P. CARTWRIGHT.

CHAPTER 1

BOW AND ARROW MEN

THOUSANDS of well-travelled people living in South Africa have never seen a Bushman. I remember, as a small boy, about the year 1907, visiting a missionary exhibition in Cape Town, at which a family of yellow, wrinkled people held the crowds spellbound (and perhaps a little shocked) with their mimicry and primitive abandon. Between 1907 and 1936, though I penetrated many far corners of Southern Africa, I encountered very few Bushmen. Not until I accompanied the University of Cape Town scientific expedition through the Kalahari in the winter of 1936 was I able to study the wild Bushmen clans leading their natural lives in the desert.

It was a fascinating experience, worth all the freezing midnights and

struggles with the sand. The Bushmen arouse the curiosity of more civilised people mainly, I think, because they are about the last people in the world still living as the Cave Man lived in Europe long ago. They are the people of the Stone Age, the cunning hunters who stake everything on their skill in the chase and their ability to find water. Other native races have flocks and firearms, homes and money. The Bushmen have retreated from these things. So deep into the desert have they gone, indeed, that there are still clans which have never been in contact with white men. They desire nothing but a stretch of country where they can shoot their game with bow and arrow undisturbed, and roam freely like the wild creatures they are. Small wonder that the Bushmen have been credited with powers and



Digging the University of Cape Town's motor truck out of heavy sand. There were always difficulties, but the expedition always got through.

instincts no longer enjoyed by other human beings. I saw enough during the Kalahari journey to convince me that the tales I had previously heard of Bushman endurance, of weird physical feats and strange knowledge had not been exaggerated.

The first group of Bushmen I met had settled for a time at a lonely spot beside the dry Nossob River, 250 miles north of Upington. Mr. Donald Bain, a well-known South African hunter and leader of desert expeditions, had persuaded them to remain there so that a party of scientists from the University of the Witwatersrand might examine them, record their speech and songs, watch their dances and investigate their psychology. This was probably the most thorough organised study of the Bushmen by specialists ever

attempted. Professor Raymond Dart, the anthropologist and discoverer of the Taungs skull, was in charge of the effort. It was a rare privilege to attend the daily “clinics” and to watch this patient unravelling of the Bushmen’s secrets.

Mr. Bain covered enormous areas of desert during the task of collecting typical specimens of the almost extinct Cape Bushman – the small people known as the Auni, whose ancestors were hunting along the shores of Table Bay when the first Portuguese navigators arrived. The Auni suffered heavily during the centuries that followed, so that by 1800 the last wild band had passed out of sight of Table Mountain, and at the beginning of the present century there were only a handful left to the south of the Orange River. It was a precarious refuge the Auni

found in the sandy wilderness where the rivers run once or twice in a hundred years. Treated like wild beasts by white men and black tribes, the Auni Bushmen dwindled in numbers. Professor Dart estimated that about half the survivors were represented among the seventy Bushmen brought together by Mr. Bain. There was no doubt that the group was the largest ever seen in modern times. The Kalahari will not support large bands in one place; and so each Bushman clan has its own territory, unmarked, but so clearly understood that the poacher of game and the stealer of water risks death when he crosses the invisible boundary. Thus these few dozens of Auni men, women and children, some pure-blooded, others of mixed descent, made a memorable sight. In height,

they were three and a half inches below the average of the shortest Bushmen measured in South-West Africa and the Western Kalahari – dwarfs indeed when compared with the white men studying them.

I found more Bushmen on the northward journey along the South-West Africa-Bechuanaland frontier. There were Narons in the Gobabis district – fierce little men who killed a magistrate in 1922 with poisoned arrows. At a frontier police post a number of Bushmen were serving sentences for cattle raiding. And at Ghanzi, wizened Bushmen and their fat wives were to be seen on every farm. The Ghanzi magistrate told me there were not less than ten thousand Bushmen in his remote area, though most of them were beyond the reach of the law. The merry band of Auni

people, however, I came to know best of all. Everyone liked them; it was pleasant to discover such care-free humans, acting round their camp-fires as though the world was young and peaceful.

One of the most interesting discoveries during my stay was made while six women, all of one family, were singing in chorus for the benefit of the professor of music. The songs, in the Afrikaans language, were plainly old folk-songs, known in South Africa as liedjies; but not one of the listeners could recognise either tunes or words. The women repeated the mysterious verses, crouching round the fire under their leopard-skin karosses, high-pitched voices ringing through the intense hush of the desert. Then the expert listeners realised that these songs had not been heard by civilised

ears for nearly a century. Some forgotten Dutch voortrekkers must have passed this way into the desert and sung these lost liedjies. Unseen Bushmen listened and remembered, handing down the words and tunes to their children. Now the songs had returned like echoes, to be recorded and preserved generations after the bold adventurers who sang them had gone to their unknown graves.

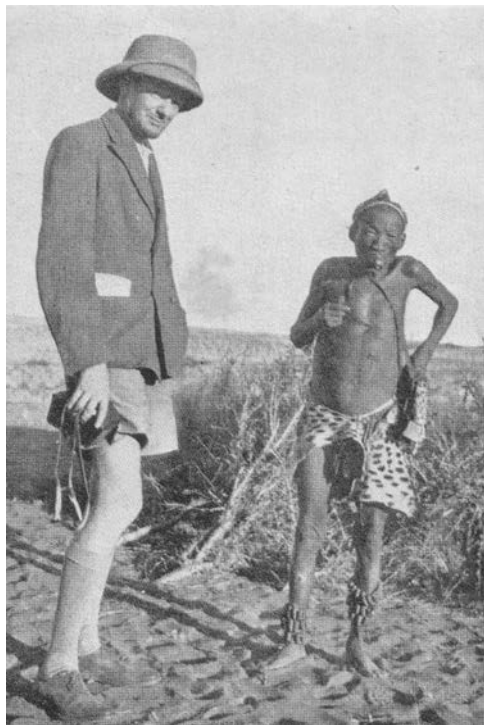
The unmarried girls who gave the performance that night were led by a girl of about fourteen. She was beautiful according to Bushman standards, a dancer and natural actress who would have delighted audiences in Europe. She led her little family troupe with all the skill of a ballet mistress, bringing into the dance a wonderful grace of movement.

It was difficult to guess the origin of

some of these dances. The girls had decorated their faces with gemsbok blood; they wore springbok skins round their waists, and beads of ostrich shell. Each girl carried her make-up of powdered roots in the shell of a tiny tortoise fastened to her ankle.

In one dance the steps were identical with the Charleston – that odd craze of the cities which could never have reached this far corner of the desert. The other dances involved movements that even the Tiller girls would have found difficult. A waltz played on a gramophone baffled the Bushmen at first, but after Mr. Bain had given a rather heavy-footed demonstration the leader picked up the time and gave a desert version of the dance.

Later that night all the Bushmen people of the camp danced to celebrate



The author and old Abraham, leader of the last of the Cape Bushmen.

the arrival of a new group of the little people. Under a moon that was almost full, and with naked limbs reddened in the firelight, the men stamped out a circle in the sand with feet thudding, cocoon anklets rattling and the women clapping and singing in barbaric cadence.

Mr. Bain had usually to set a limit to the dancing, or the Bushmen would continue through the night. On this occasion, however, he gave no orders, for he knew that the dance would encourage the new arrivals to become friendly with the Bushmen already settled in camp.

Among the dancers was a famous Bushman character named Old Abraham¹ – a wizened dwarf who has

been known to scientific investigators in South Africa ever since 1850. No wild man is Abraham, but a wise and friendly old fellow who still enjoys life in the open at an age of at least a century. The doctor of our party spoke to him in Afrikaans and Abraham replied in the same language: “Ah, I see you are an Englishman – your accent is not very good.”

Abraham’s age and excellent general health raised an interesting point – the well-established longevity of the Bushmen. Their physical appearance is not impressive, but of their resistance to disease and the most fearful accidents of the desert there can be no doubt. Abraham had never used a tooth-brush, but he still possessed a full set of teeth, worn almost to the gums. Youngsters of sixty and seventy had perfect white

¹ The death of Old Abraham has been reported since these lines were written.

teeth. Research has proved that the Bushmen are less liable to ailments and epidemics than other native races in South Africa. The great Spanish influenza scourge of 1918 did not leave them unscathed, but the mortality was not severe. A high death-rate always exists among the children, due to desert conditions, ignorance and the inevitable deficiencies of diet. But the survivors are not easily infected – weaklings are non-existent by the time the people reach adult age. Bushmen are said never to contract smallpox or leprosy. When smallpox swept through the Cape in the eighteenth century, with a toll of many thousands, the Bushmen alone escaped. During the rainy season in the Kalahari the Bushmen cannot avoid malaria, but they do not suffer as heavily as the Hottentots and

Bechuanas. The Bushmen have their own herbal remedies, and, what is more, the will to recover. I heard of a Bushman mauled by a lion near Ghanzi. In spite of great pain, he had the presence of mind to throw sand in the lion's eyes, and thus broke away with ghastly injuries. A police sergeant found him suffering from septic poisoning and treated him. The Bushman is alive today. Few white men would have survived such an encounter.

Very old Bushmen have lingered on among the mountains of settled districts in South Africa, only to end their adventurous lives in sudden tragedy. Not many years ago a farmer in the Beaufort district found signs of Bushmen where he had never suspected their presence. He took a bag of gunpowder to the spot and

packed it into a hollow log. Soon afterwards the two wretched Bushmen lit a fire and blew themselves to pieces. There were no court proceedings. Only in recent years have farmers been told by the authorities that Bushmen rank as “Royal game,” not vermin to be shot at sight like the jackals and leopards. President Kruger himself was once called upon to settle the question. Farmers on the Kalahari borders of the Transvaal Republic came to the old President asking: “These Bushmen who take our cattle – are they human beings or animals?”

“Well,” replied the President, “if you can find animals that carry knives and smoke tobacco, then the Bushmen are animals. If not, you must not shoot them.”

That was a merciful view in those days, and even now the Bushman

receives little consideration from the governments of the three stretches of Kalahari where he is making his last stand. Once the Bushman roamed the shores and forests of South Africa, leaving, in caves and on kopjes, those wonderful paintings that a Royal Academician could not improve upon in colour or in vigorous action. The Bushman fled for his life from these pleasant places where he was never thirsty, and found refuge in a wilderness that civilised man did not covet. Now some of the desert has been cut up, surveyed, proclaimed as game reserves or – where there is grass and water – handed over to ranchers. It was inevitable, but for the Bushman it was a tragedy. Meat he must have; yet when he trails a gemsbok bravely and brings it down within the area of a police patrol he

cannot feast in peace. The unknown horrors of prison await him – prison, where so many Bushmen have languished and died like wild creatures in a zoo.

Mr. Bain's camp on the Nossob became a sanctuary indeed for the hard-pressed Bushmen. Some of them had been living to the northward, between the Auob and Nossob, in the area known officially as the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park. They had just been turned out of this happy hunting-ground, and would have fared badly but for Mr. Bain's hospitality. I believe the Union Government has now realised that these little humans deserve the protection already given to the animals, and that a Bushman reserve will soon be created where they can live their own lives.

Bushmen do not peer into the future.

The bands I saw gathered at Bain's Camp recovered their good humour immediately they found there was plenty to eat and nothing to fear. They devoted themselves to games and merry-making, showing their gratitude plainly and winning the hearts of all who studied them. You will see no happier people in Africa than a party of Bushmen with full stomachs.

2

The Bushmen adore their children, and reveal their affection in many ways. In the dance of the gemsbok, for example, the fathers teach the children a lesson that may save lives during the chase in years to come. A wily old hunter takes the part of the gemsbok, holding sharp sticks to his head to represent the horns; while the children are the dogs. Every movement of a hunting drama is portrayed with such

realism that the human bodies fade out, the brown man with the horns becomes a cornered antelope, the children dashing in and out, snapping and barking, are dogs indeed. The gemsbok slashes left and right fiercely, then tires, pants, struggles for life while the hunters shout and thrust their spears forward. Finally the buck goes down, fighting to the last, hunters and dogs close in and the dance ends. A young Bushman is not reckoned a man until he has killed a gemsbok or some other dangerous game, and his parents are anxious that he should not go out with his spear ill-prepared for the ordeal.

Dogs are the only domesticated animals the Bushmen have ever possessed. They have never owned cattle, and thus (unlike the more prosperous Hottentots) their ideas of

numbers are extremely limited. "One, two – many," says the Bushman. The dogs, however, have been their companions for centuries. Side by side they have travelled far through Africa, and together they have won many little victories. The finest type of Bushman hunting dog, a light brown ridge-back mongrel with a dark stripe and a trace of the greyhound in his appearance, is now verging on extinction. They are, without a doubt, the best dogs in the world for the hunter's purpose, lean and savage, ready to keep a wounded leopard at bay until the master finds an opening for his spear. One of the most typical of these dogs I saw stood about fourteen inches at the shoulder with a length of body seemingly out of proportion to that height. A broad forehead, sharp muzzle, upright ears and long drooping tail made him

anything but a beauty. Yet this was possibly the oldest and certainly the most cunning breed of dog in the world.

A fugitive with his master, the Bushman dog has learnt the virtue of silence. Some declare this dog never barks; at all events there is no senseless barking to give his master's hiding-place away. The dog slinks always behind his master, taking advantage of every patch of shade, reserving his energy for the moment when he is called upon to distract the quarry's attention. Sensing danger, he will give only a warning whine. Between Bushman and dog there is complete trust and understanding. Many travellers in the Kalahari have tried to bribe the Bushmen with tobacco to part with a hunting dog, but I have yet to hear of one who was

successful.

It is natural that these primitive people should have kept alive that early luxury, the tale that is told. One of the scientists pointed out to me a Bushman who had just arrived in camp from a great distance. He squatted beside a fire and held his small audience enchanted by his narrative. "He is describing everything he has seen since he has been away," said the scientist. "Animals, birds, trees, the smallest living things of the veld, the remote water-holes where he quenched his thirst – every detail has a meaning for these people. For an hour or two, perhaps, he will talk and the others will not utter a word. Then, when he has finished, they will ask questions."

The Bushman, as I have said, lives in the present and has only the vaguest

tradition to explain his origin. Rare indeed is the Bushman who can tell you anything of a departed grandfather. I met a lonely farmer who had discovered queer rock engravings on his property, and tried to find an interpretation with the aid of Bushmen working for him as labourers. The Bushmen could suggest nothing; it was not reticence, but sheer ignorance. The farmer himself observed that the engravings were all near sources of water, and believed they were messages from one old Bushman clan to another. Engravings are rare, but the paintings of hunting scenes on the walls of rock shelters are found from the Cape, northwards through Africa, to the very hill-sides of Mediterranean countries. The resemblance between paintings discovered in Europe and those found thousands of miles to the

south is so striking that the migration of the Bushmen can be traced without guesswork. I think the gnomes and elves of ancient Europe were none other than the dwarfs who danced for us at Bain's Camp in the Kalahari.

3

Murders by wild Bushmen on the frontiers of South-West Africa still find a place occasionally in the day's news. They raid the outlying farms, shoot cattle with their poisoned arrows, and defend themselves when pursued by the police.

Yet the Bushmen do not entirely deserve the sinister reputation that clings to them. There are reasons for their clashes with the police. In Gobabis one day I heard tales of the Bushmen that revealed the better qualities of the strange little people

who live beyond the law.

Gobabis is a railhead on the eastern frontier, centre of a huge district still in the pioneer stage. The Bushmen have not forgotten their treatment by the Germans, when they were hunted and shot at sight.

Even in those days, early in the century, however, there was one man who became friendly with the Bushmen – a man who treated them with kindness and earned their gratitude. He is still living in Gobabis, this Herr Albert Lemke, a lean and sun-bronzed Mecklenburger, seventy-one years old, with a pointed beard and a pioneer face. We sat together in the hotel beer-garden and I listened to the story of an adventurous life.

“‘ja,’ I was a Kalahari trader – exchanging cups and knives for ostrich

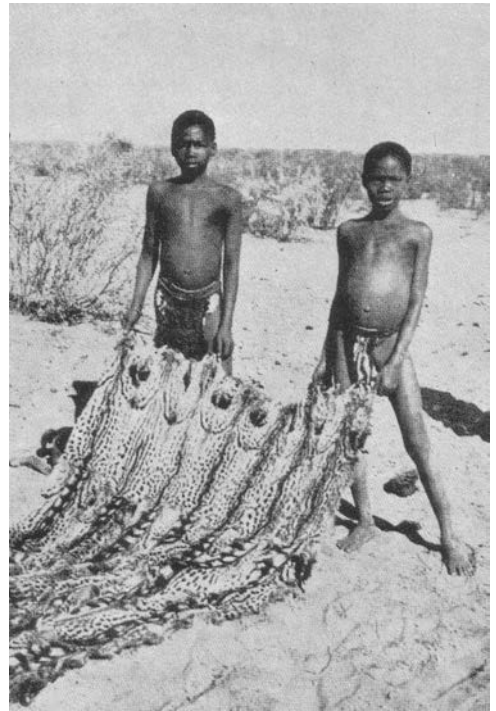


A Kalahari trader purchasing leopard and other wild animal skins from a native hunter.

skins,” recalled Herr Lemke. “I have seen lots of Africa. When I first went to the Victoria Falls there was nothing there. I have walked for nearly a hundred miles in the desert with all my water in one ostrich egg, after my horses died. And so I came to know the Bushmen.”

“Some people ask me – how can you recognise a Bushman? It is a great controversy among scientists sometimes. Well, you must have an eye for a Bushman. The pure-bred Bushman is not so yellow as a Hottentot. He is small, his cheek-bones stand out like the Chinese, and, his pepper-corn hair grows in patches with bare skin between.”

“After I married, I settled at Rietfontein, a favourite water-hole of the Bushmen, and brought up my children among them.”



A fine kaross of wildcat skins.

I had been to Rietfontein. and seen the ruins of the German fort, the barracks and Herr Lemke's store. Rietfontein lies on the track to the Ghanzi settlement and Lake Ngami. It is about one hundred and seventy miles from Gobabis, and a German garrison was stationed there during the Herero wars – a last outpost only a few miles from the Bechuanaland Protectorate boundary. Herr Lemke kept beer and provisions for the soldiers and traded with the remote Ghanzi people.

“I tamed the Bushmen and they became my faithful servants,” went on Herr Lemke. “Some of them could understand Afrikaans and German, and I could speak their language. They are not stupid; it is only that they have never seen a white man's possessions and have to learn how to hold a spade before they can use it.

“You have heard of the marvellous endurance, the physique of the Bushman ? I will give you an example. When I wanted to send letters to Gobabis in a hurry I would give them to a Bushman runner. Again and again that little fellow covered the double journey, three hundred and forty miles, within five days.

“Go out hunting with a Bushman and you will see how he follows a wounded buck, hour after hour, tireless, until he overtakes the creature, with the arrow in its flank. His eyesight, I think, is more like that of a bird than a human being. Often my Bushman tracker has urged me to shoot – he has seen the horns of a buck two thousand yards away, invisible to me.”

“ ‘Ja,’ they are tough, those Bushmen. Once there was a little Bushman boy

caught in a steel game-trap. There was a leopard around – it would have eaten him – so the boy cut his foot off and escaped.”

“A Bushman will never leave his master’s side in time of danger. Now I have met a lot of lions, but I have never shot one. There was a Kalahari hunter whose rifle misfired – a lion had him down and was mauling him, when a Bushman servant caught the lion’s mane and tried to pull it away. You must remember that these people have always killed their game at close quarters. They have faced every wild beast, wounded and at bay. Their bravery is almost incredible.

“Only a few years ago two prospectors left Gobabis, trekking by ox-wagon into the Kalahari, and intending to be away six weeks. The time passed and no word came from them. An aero-

plane was sent out to search. The missing men were located with a band of wild Bushmen, who had led them to water and saved their lives.”

“The Bushman is treacherous only when he is approached in the wrong way. It is suicide to come between a Bushman and his meat. Sometimes, when game is scarce, the Bushman is half-starved; and in a dry season he will attack a stranger who approaches the water-hole where a thin trickle keeps him and his family alive. But that is the law of the wild – the Kalahari is to blame, not the people who live there so precariously.”

“Nowadays most of the trouble between the Bushmen and the police is caused by the game laws. Bows and arrows have been declared illegal weapons. Then comes a long drought, and the Bushmen are forced out of

their hiding-places to seek food. News of their raids reaches the police, a patrol goes out, and if they find the Bushmen (which does not often happen) there is a fight.

“In 1922, Captain van Ryneveld, the magistrate of Gobabis, led the police in an attempt to round up a party of Bushman raiders. I warned him not to ride in among the Bushmen – they would not understand that he was only trying to arrest them. So the magistrate was killed by a poisoned arrow. Most of the Bushmen who took part in that fight are still roaming the desert, free. White men cannot catch Bushmen.”

4

In Gobabis and several other places I saw the sinister arrows that, even in recent years, have killed white officials, missionaries and many

natives. Very little is known of the poisons used, for each group of Bushmen has its own plant juices, leaves and grubs. Some authorities state that snake venom is employed, but others deny this. One scratch is fatal when the poison is intended to kill. Many arrows, however, are tipped with a mixture that paralyses the game but does not spoil the meat. Poison-making is a secret ritual. Ready for use, the poison is stored in hollow pebbles.

During a raid in the Epukiro area north of Gobabis not long ago a police horse was struck by an arrow. Several Bushmen were caught, and the police forced them to apply the antidote to the poison. The life of the horse was saved, while samples of both poison and antidote were sent to the Government analyst. Thus one secret

was revealed, though many remain undiscovered.

The Bushmen make their arrows with a weak point in the shaft, so that a wounded buck dashing away through the bush will shed part of the arrow while the poisoned tip remains in the flesh.

I was shown tiny bows no larger than a man's finger, made of gemsbok and eland horn. A little quiver held darts steeped in deadly poison. The Bushman does not part readily with such possessions. They are made, not as toys for the children, but with one object – murder. This is the Bushman's "love bow," or "revolver," the weapon he selects when there is a quarrel round the camp-fire over women. The arrow is usually aimed at the victim's ear while he is asleep.

Larger arrows are often tipped with the shank-bones of ostriches. The poisoned head may be detached and slipped into the hollow shaft for safety. At Mr. Bain's camp the box of arrows he had collected was kept locked. When he opened it, and I stared at the arrows, I felt my eyes smarting. The poison gives off a vapour with this effect, unpleasant but not dangerous. All attempts to analyse the insidious poison have failed.

There is no doubt that the Bushmen use their bows and arrows with skill equal to the finest the world has ever seen. These small men, wiry rather than muscular, make their bows of extremely tough wood – so tough, indeed, that only the strongest white man can hope to bend one to its fullest extent. Strung with sinew, a bow three feet in length drives the arrow home

with tremendous force. Like all savages they invariably stalk their game and shoot when a miss is almost out of the question. I watched a queer demonstration at a Kalahari police station where a Bushman was awaiting trial on a charge of murder. The constable who had captured the man was a Bushman, too, and they made a remarkable contrast – the prisoner naked save for his leg-irons, the Bushman constable in blue-uniform jersey and shorts. A cigarette tin was set up at a distance of about fifty yards, and both Bushmen displayed their skill. They used the bow and arrows which were to appear as exhibits at the trial! The murderer, who had been pining in gaol for weeks, gave a poor show. His shooting improved when I held out a few cigarettes. The constable was the

better marksman, however, in spite of the fact that he had been trained to use a rifle and had not drawn a bow for months. I admired the way he estimated the wind by throwing dust in the air.

When hunting buck and ostriches, of course, the Bushman adopts suitable disguises, aided by his art of mimicry. He can walk right up to a flock of ostriches wearing a skin and feathers, supporting the long neck on a stick, preening himself as he goes. A small bush serves the purpose when buck are being stalked. At such times there is no limit to his patience. Chapman, the famous hunter and trader, recorded meeting a Bushman who had wounded a giraffe and followed it for 50 miles. Many a Bushman has trailed a wounded animal without rest for three days rather than lose the meat.

One of the earliest accounts of the Bushman, written by a Dutch explorer in 1659, described them as “an entirely wild nation without houses or cattle, but well-armed with bows and arrows.” That, as I have seen, is true today. The search for food and water keeps them for ever wandering, so that they have no homes more permanent than a grass shelter from the wind, with a fire to keep the lions away. Every old Bushman carries scars on his wrinkled stomach, signs of cold nights when he has curled up too close to the fire and been scorched. Seldom does a clan consist of more than twenty men, women and children – the struggle for food is too hard, and the Bushmen must scatter to survive. Each clan stores water in ostrich eggs, and each has its secret drinking places; tiny wells covered over with stones

and sand, not a tell-tale sign of the precious hoard remaining unconcealed. When the springs dry up in a bad season, and the ostrich eggs are empty, there are always roots and bulbs and the wonderful t’samma melons to sustain life. I noticed Bushman children with stomachs swollen to an alarming extent, the result of over-indulgence in this wild melon that is moist but lacking in nourishment. Nevertheless, without these melons the desert would be uninhabitable. They grow always on the tops of the dunes, in great patches. The Bushmen store them in dry sand, so that the melons remain in good condition for weeks. From the crushed seeds a drink is made, the poor Bushman’s coffee. All the animals, from the elephant and lion right down to the desert mice, flourish on the

speckled green melon. T'samma, roasted in the camp-fire and then cooled, quenches the Bushman's thirst. Roast t'samma and jackal form the Bushman's favourite dish.

Any other race, faced with the prospect of obtaining all their water from the juice of a melon, their food from roots and berries, would probably have collapsed and died. The Bushmen were determined to live, and so these hardy bands of hunters have survived precariously into our own time. They are without chiefs or leaders, without the simplest tribal organisation. Surrounded on all sides, with no hope of retreat, asking for no mercy, the Bushmen are still fighting desperately for survival. I trust that my own country, the Union of South Africa, will be the first to give these gallant little people something better

than drudgery or death.

CHAPTER 2

HERMITS OF THE KALAHARI

“AEROPLANES, motor-cars, radio sets – they are spoiling the Kalahari.”

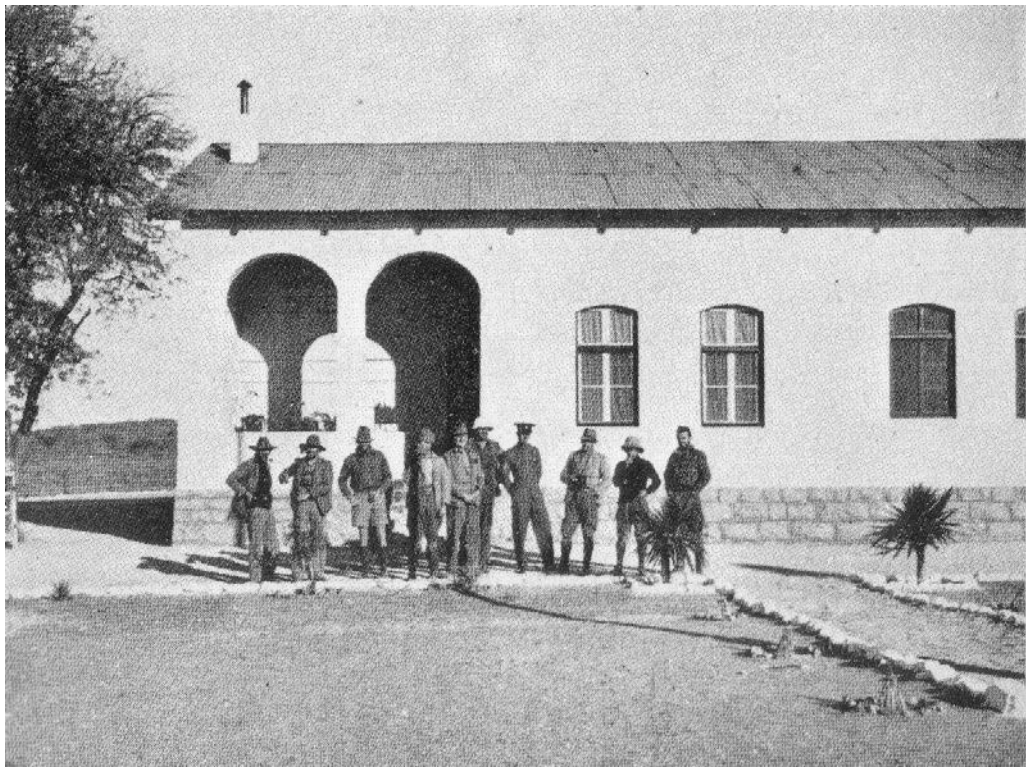
He was a man who had spent months alone in the desert, and he spoke forcefully. Yet this was the sentiment dominating many others along the empty trails in that land of the great hush between Upington on the Orange River, Gobabis in South-West Africa, and eastwards to Ngami and Maun. To some of the people of the wilderness loneliness is a luxury.

Along the whole eastern frontier of South-West Africa there is only one police station, the border post at Sandfontein. There the University of Cape Town scientific expedition, which I accompanied, halted early one morning to drink coffee at the

invitation of the sergeant. Within sight of the solid, comfortable house (built in the German time) runs the frontier. Save for one right-angle turn, the line cuts down the map, unbroken from north to south, for 750 miles. Part of it is “outside the police zone,” too inaccessible for regular patrols. But there are many bands of Bushmen on both sides of the border, wild Bushmen who raid the cattle on the farms and recognise no international frontier signs.

The main task of the sergeant and the two constables at Sandfontein is to trace these bow-and-arrow raiders. Not long ago a native constable was struck in the finger by a poisoned arrow. He cut off his finger and saved his life.

A few miles away a Union Jack guides the traveller to a stone-walled post built by Bushmen prisoners, Olifant’s



The last police post on the eastern border of South-West Africa. Members of the expedition at Sandfontein, just before driving into the desert.

Kloof. On the door of the living-room a notice reads: "The Inebriate's Home, or the Last Resting Place of a Bechuanaland Protectorate Police Sergeant." A message from headquarters takes nearly a month to reach this clean-shaven, smartly-uniformed young man. He does not appear to mind his isolation. He, too, finds his days and nights filled with the problem of Bushman raiders, gun-runners and crimes that a city policeman is never called upon to tackle.

One of the native constables at this post pointed to my khaki sun helmet and ventured a warning : "Don't look for Bushmen if you are wearing that helmet, sir – they often shoot at the sight of a uniform, and they may think you are a police officer."

Farther on, beside the huge pan marked on the map as Kalkfontein, I

met a true hermit of the desert. He was an elderly German, living in twin rondavels he had furnished comfortably with the aid of his own clever hands. The walls were hung with magnificent karosses, with the ostrich-egg shells used by the Bushmen for hoarding water, with quivers, beads and tortoise shells.

I wondered how he lived until I saw his workshop. Muzzle-loaders were stacked on a bench, and the hermit explained that he mended these ancient guns for the people of the native village.

He will soon be seventy, and he has been living in the desert, trekking, hunting, trading, for a quarter of a century. When I asked him about the Great War and the invasion of South-West Africa he seemed a little vague. I gathered that he had disappeared into

the spaces which even war could not reach. The War, I think, must have confirmed his distaste for civilisation. He does not wish to travel beyond the borders of the desert again.

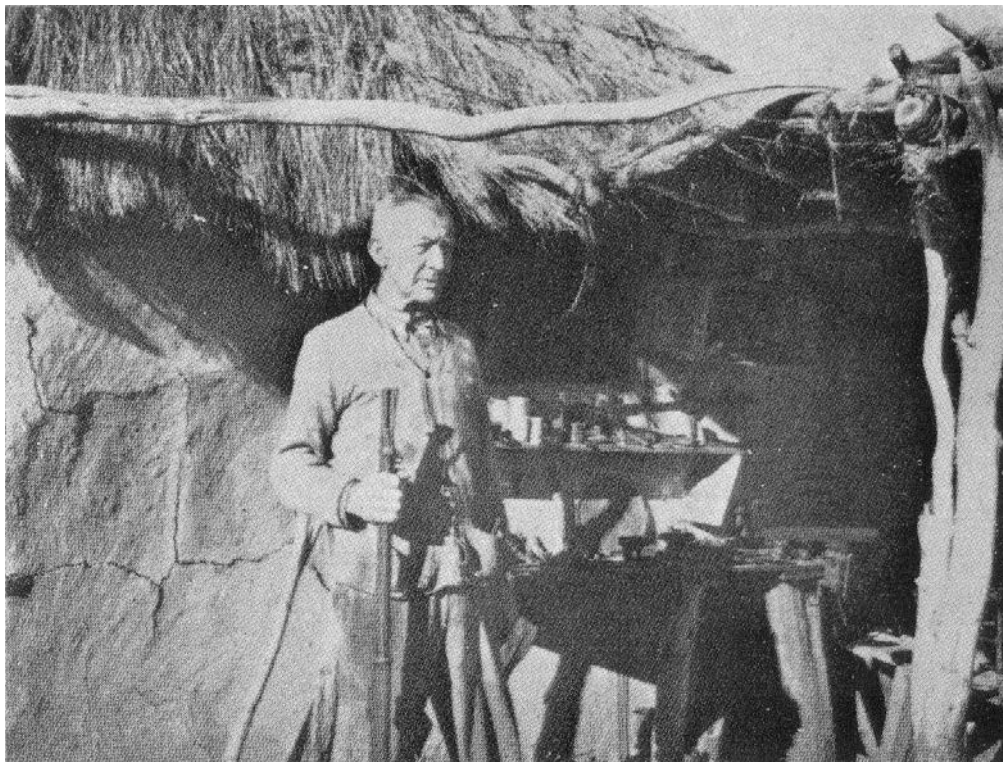
Close to the hermit's huts stand a large, cool home and a store. There Miss Sharp keeps house for her brother, the trader. It is a home worthy of more beautiful surroundings, though the hospitality offered to the expedition could not have been more generous. You have to travel across the hot frontier into Bechuanaland to realise how good a cup of tea can taste, how refreshing the sight of violets in a Kalahari garden can be.

Miss Sharp talked of the summer malaria, when the pan is filled with water and the mosquitoes whine against the netting. She pointed out the wells that keep the natives alive in the

dry winter; the thatched huts of the Baralong, the *stad* of the rascally, thieving Kalahari's and village of the well-behaved Damaras. These are her brother's customers, and this is Kalkfontein – the glaring white pan, the three villages, the Sharp domain within the neat stockade and the abode of the German hermit.

A strange setting in which to find an educated woman. Yet Miss Sharp, with her books, her garden and her home, is not bored. Many a tired and bearded traveller has reason to be thankful for her presence at the little spot shown only on large-scale maps as Kalkfontein.

Among the men of the remote Bechuanaland settlements the remedy for boredom, apparently, is to increase the dose of loneliness. "I just take a gun and get out into the veld for a few



The German hermit of the Kalahari.

days when I feel fed-up,” one Government official told me.

Another man, whose name and achievements are known from the Zambesi to the Molopo, disappears into the desert for months at a stretch. No one knows where he goes, though he is credited with all the skill and knowledge of a Bushman in finding food and water. He has lived in the territory for so long that there can be few corners he has not explored. But this he does for his own satisfaction and in his own way. I tried to trace him, but the reply was always the same. “He is out in ‘the blue’ – don’t know when he will be back.”

The Kalahari calls men of many races. I remember a grey-haired French colonel, at Maun, an engineer who knows Africa from end to end. He was clearing the rivers of the Okavango

swamps when I met him moving the papyrus grass that chokes the streams so that people far away might cultivate the land. A Government contract, it was, and a splendid idea hampered only by lack of money.

“Lost all my makorros on the last journey – the hippos were naughty and broke them,” he remarked. (A makorro is the native dug-out canoe used in the swamps.)

Someone asked him how he was able to travel in that water jungle without boats.

“I told my boys to cut down trees and make new dug-outs,” answered the colonel simply. “Also I punished the hippos – there were fifty in the troublesome herd, and I shot five bulls. Pouf! I am able to proceed.”

The colonel once walked through East

Africa with two carriers. He shot elephants in the French Congo and lions in Angola, but never a skin or head did he bother to collect. In territories where men take daily quinine and sleep beneath nets, the colonel brushes precautions aside. The only illness he ever suffered in Africa was the result of eating wild onions. Now the Bechuanaland Protectorate has captured his imagination, too, and with steel hippo-proof boats he will navigate waterways where no white man has been before. *Bon voyage, mon colonel!*

Traders at branch stores may justly claim to be included among the loneliest men in the Kalahari. Natives are employed as assistants, but there is always a white man in charge; and that man sees few other white faces during a spell of duty lasting two years. Yet

there are few who would be willing to change places with any city shop assistant.

Trade as I saw it at a large store in Maun was a fascinating affair. A back room was piled high with skins destined for the London market, now the centre of the world's fur trade.

There were sleek otters, caught in reed traps or speared in the shallow rivers. About fifty of these skins may go into a single coat. Once the traders were paying the natives a sovereign for each perfect skin. Now the demand has been affected by the karakul fashion, and about seven shillings is the price at Maun. The skin of the female otter is the more valuable, for though the dog otter is twice the size it does not possess the dark and shiny qualities of the female. Summer skins are valueless. The winter skin, first scraped

with a native axe, then rubbed interminably by hand, delights the eye of the dresser.

Here is a box of leopard skins, small rough veld leopards or smooth and glossy river leopards – each good specimen worth £5 in the Union. The native who risks his life with a blunderbuss is happy to receive half that amount for the skin. Tiger cats, striped like Bengal tigers, red cats, wild cats and jackals are usually hunted with dogs and finished off with knobkerries. By such adventures the native hunter earns half a crown a skin. Python skins, 15 feet to 20 feet in length, are worth a little more.

Ivory is a commodity appearing in the books of the Kalahari trader, though the price has dropped from 12s. 6d. 4s. per lb. While friends of a chief may hunt the elephant with modern rifles,

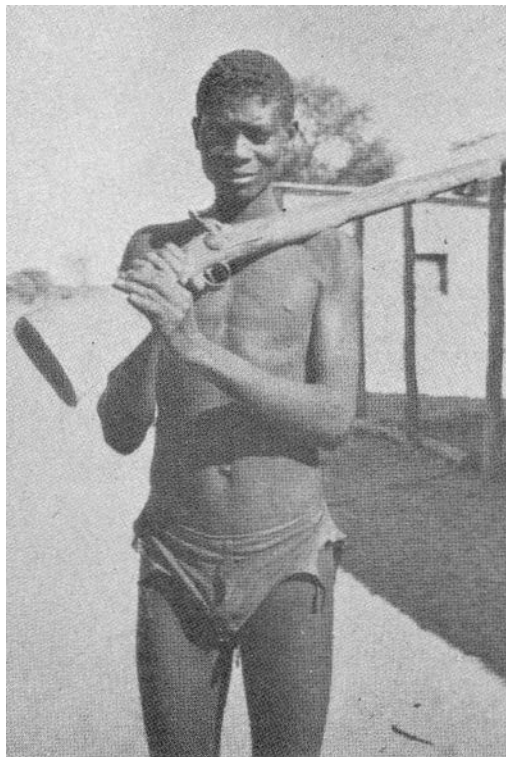
less influential natives are prepared to bag their tuskers with muzzle-loaders. They aim at the leg, cripple the elephant, and kill with a head shot at point-blank range.

It is said that guns left behind by David Livingstone are still in use in this territory, and after examining some of the weapons owned by natives, I can believe the statement. The date 1760 appears on a few of these incredible fowling-pieces. Stores display typical blunderbusses made in London long ago; and, caps and sheets of lead for bullets are details of the stock-in-trade sold every day. Such a gun costs thirty shillings, and has a range of about three hundred yards. The wily native, however, has no illusions about his weapon. He relies on stalking, not gunpowder.

During the cold Kalahari winter the

trader never allows his stock of blankets to run low. Uniforms are in great demand, not only because decorations please the native taste, but also because the shrewd buyer knows that soldiers are given hard wearing clothes. I was told that it is difficult to procure gaudy uniforms of Ruritanian pattern nowadays. There is profit for the dealer who can ship a foreign army's outfit to Bechuanaland.

The native as a customer is not difficult to satisfy. Apart from the semi-civilised Batawana's round about Maun, all Ngamiland is still a raw territory, eager to purchase coveted clothes, foods and boots of the white man up to the limit of purchasing power. Money is something to be spent immediately. There is a great demand for tea; the only coffee drinkers are the Damaras, who brought



Bechuanaland native hunter carrying a muzzle loading blunderbuss.

the taste with them when the Germans drove them out of South-West Africa. Sugar sticks, pocket-knives, mouth-organs, vaseline and soap, brass and copper for bangles, salt and shawls – such is the array on the trader's shelves. Cigarettes are smoked only by the more prosperous natives; but the craving for tobacco is universal, and many tribes grow tobacco first, food crops afterwards.

Thus native cattle and the skins of wild animals are converted, more or less by direct barter, into manufactured goods from South Africa and other countries. The trader lives well and forgets that he is hundreds of miles away from the nearest railway line. He, too, feels the spell of the desert as he handles its riches.

Traders, officials, missionaries and

their wives have one common meeting ground in the Bechuanaland outposts – the tennis-court. There is tennis even in places where golf is impossible, and once a week all the white exiles gather happily to play and chatter over the teacups. At one such party in Maun I saw an aged witch-doctor (convicted as a result of unsuccessful treatment of a patient in a fiery pit) on duty for the afternoon fielding the balls. That was the only touch of the old Africa in that distant scene.

If the men do not dress for dinner every night they have other methods of safeguarding morale. Unshaven chins are unknown. I am afraid the full beards worn by some of the members of the expedition startled the people of the Kalahari!

The conventional picture of night in the desert outpost is not complete

without bottles. Indeed, it would be a poor arid empty life without a sun-downer and a second drink when strangers from beyond the frontiers arrive. Brandy and water is the sundown, solace throughout the territory. With transport costing £1 per 100 lb., beer is a luxury, while brandy is taken with all due restraint.

Somewhere in South-West Africa, however, I found myself leaning against a polished counter with a suntanned man who had taken part in desperate adventures and had raised a thirst to match.

“In this country we drink a lot,” said the candid adventurer. “We have had two sherries – now we will have four or five more sherries. In summer, of course, the climate does not allow us to drink much wine. We are abstemious – we stick to whisky and

brandy.”

He caught the barman’s eye, nodded and went on.

“Of course, in this country no one has any money. But the barman has brandy. He gives me a card, I sign it, and that appears to satisfy him. A curious custom.

“Now we will have dinner. After dinner I like to find a good drink and stick to it. Tonight I think it will be cherry brandy. Eight or nine will be sufficient – we drink a lot, but never to excess. And tomorrow you must come out to my farm and try some white brandy. What, the expedition is moving on ? A pity. In this country ...”

At intervals of years these men of the outposts emerge and blink like Rip Van Winkles upon the strange scene in Cape Town, or Johannesburg, or

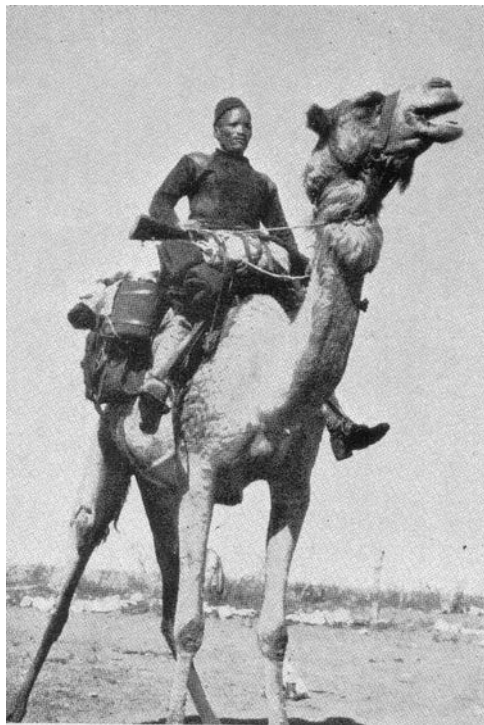
London. Such an experience merely strengthens their opinion that the white ash of a remote camp-fire is more comforting than crowds and electric radiators.

The desert offers freedom from worry and all the thousand little restrictions people in cities have made for themselves. It is simply a matter of temperament. Those who stay, year after year, in places where the mail takes a month or more to come through – those are the men who have made the right choice.

2

“Change direction right – right wheel! Come on, you baboons. Halt! Order harrumph!”

The voice that sounded across the sandy parade ground held the penetrating note of a British Army sergeant-



Camel patrol. A Bechuanaland protectorate police trooper sets out into the desert, fully equipped.

major. When I looked out from my netted veranda, however, I saw a black lance-corporal (acting and unpaid) drilling a squad of dark-skinned constables of the Bechuanaland Protectorate Police.

This remarkable force probably covers a larger area than any other police service of equal strength in the world. A dozen white officers, two dozen white sergeants and 230 native N.C.O.s, mounted troopers and constables patrol a country about the size of France and still partly unexplored. They drill like Guardsmen, these sturdy, black policemen, with their upturned felt hats, blue jerseys, leather belts, shorts and putties. Most of the native races of the Protectorate are to be found in their ranks, Bushman, Bechuana and Bamangwato, with stocky, muscular

men brought over from Basutoland.

I think that even recent reports in the files of the "B.P.P." must contain more stirring adventure than one expects to find in modern South Africa. Tales of forced marches and strange encounters, of desperate remedies and lonely posts – all these I heard told casually during a journey through the Kalahari to Ngamiland.

One outpost of the force on the northern frontier is so remote that the sergeant in charge has no certainty of seeing a white visitor during the whole period of duty there – two years. Only one motor-car has ever reached this distant station. If you travel on horseback the journey takes a fortnight from Maun. (Half a day, of course, by the despised aeroplane.) They call the place Mahembo, and it lies close to the Caprivi Strip, a lawless finger of

territory not long ago where white gun-runners and black robbers flourished unchecked.

The sergeant at Mahembo has neighbours some miles away, a German mission where the Roman Catholic fathers have built a reproduction of a Rhineland grain mill, a water-wheel and a rose garden. Nevertheless, supplies are so difficult to obtain that the sergeant must take everything with him – 15,000 cigarettes, tea, sugar and other groceries on the same scale. Yet they find men who fit the job and like it; men who apply to return when their leave is over; strong men who would say: “No, thank you, sir,” if an archangel offered them a second sundowner.

When the sergeant patrols the rivers and swamps he uses makorros – a fleet of three dug-out canoes. The hippo is

the main danger in these waters; a cow with calf is usually aggressive, and then the canoe traveller finds a huge body thrusting at his craft from below and finally biting it in half. So there must be canoes in reserve to pick up the victims of such encounters. A large dug-out, holding three paddlers and three passengers, costs £4 10s. In such a canoe the sergeant at Mahembo has covered the 358 miles to Maun in twenty-two days.

News travels fast in this territory, and the movements of a white official on patrol are always known (as they are in every other tropical corner of Africa) long before he reaches a village. It is difficult to explain this fact, for drums are not widely used in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Is it telepathy?

Recover or die – that is the position of

a man who falls ill in a place like Mahembo. Weeks may pass before a runner returns with a doctor. Even the district headquarters, such as Maun or Ghanzi, are incredibly remote. Maun is 200 miles to the north of Ghanzi; but to send a letter from one place to the other by the regular mail service takes weeks. The letter leaves by motor-lorry for Palapye Road on the railway; it travels through Mafeking, reaches Windhoek, then goes by branch railway to Gobabis. There the process slows up. A cart struggles across the frontier and finally a packdonkey ambles into Ghanzi. The expedition I accompanied carried a letter from Maun to the police sergeant at Ghanzi in one day.

3

One morning I sat in a police sergeant's office-hut in Ngamiland. A

circular thatched roof, whitewashed walls, with a great map of the territory, blankets over the tables, netted doors and windows, cases of Mark VII cartridges and rifles – such was the setting. Two native constables had arrived after a patrol in the swamp region, a patrol of about seven hundred miles, mainly on foot, that had lasted for ten weeks.

“Come in – single file;” ordered the sergeant. The men stood to attention and the native lance-corporal, acting as interpreter, cleared his throat.

“Any news?”

“No news, Morena.”

News in these parts means police news – murders and witchcraft, game poaching and serious crime. Then one of the constables narrated without emotion the story of a journey worthy

of a Fellowship of the Royal Geographical Society, while the sergeant tried to follow him on the large-scale map.

“We came to a large island in the swamps, Morena. Some of the people said they had seen the police many years ago; others declared they had heard of the police but had never seen them. Afterwards we came to a place where the people had never heard of a white man. They were wild people. They did not understand us when we spoke of the hut tax.

“At first we could not approach these people. The women remained in the village, but the men cleared out when they saw our uniforms. All the time we used our fly switches – plenty of tsetse there, and much water going down the river. We talked quietly and gently to the women. Next day an old

man returned, and we talked still more gently, and shot a buck so that the people might have meat. Then the old man brought the others back.

“After that we came to a village called Mombo, where even the old men had never paid taxes. They were ignorant people, Morena – they know nothing, they just exist. But they have gardens and are not hungry. Some hunt by surrounding game and chasing them into the water with spears. Others have muzzle loaders. One man possessed a Martini and many slaves. There are cattle on the island, but they can be taken off only at low water, through one place where there are no tsetse flies.”

“Was there sickness among the people?” inquired the sergeant.

“No, Morena, they were fine and

healthy.”

“No sickness at all?”

“Well, many of them had lost their hands and feet.”

The sergeant produced a photograph. “Is that it?” The constable nodded. “Leprosy,” said the sergeant. “What do these people eat?”

The constable referred to his notebook. “They were making nets such as Morena puts on the tennis-court,” he replied. “Also there are buffalo – thousands, thousands. The buffalo enter the village and most of the people have broken arms and ribs. The malaria is bad, too.”

“But they are all fine and healthy,” recalled the sergeant with sarcasm. “Well, where did you go next?”

“We crossed the river and made a fire

under a tree. A man came and chased us, saying: ‘That is my tree – I will not share my shade with anyone.’ So we moved to another tree and the tampans (poisonous insects) drove us away. Then we went back to the man and spoke strongly, asking for shelter.”

“Then I suppose he offered you milk and food, and sent young girls to wait on you?” queried the sergeant.

“No, no, Morena – he told us to go into the kraal and sleep with the cattle. He was a very queer man and disliked the police.”

“How did you cross the rivers?”

The shorter of the two constables answered. “I jumped on the tall man’s back. Sometimes we used the floating grass, or makorros.”

“The people have makorros, then?”

“Yes, but not good ones. They guard their makorro trees jealously. ‘This tree is my tree,’ a man will say. They wear skins and have never seen blankets. They are River Bushmen, and very shy people.”

At the end of the report the sergeant opened a ledger and glanced up.

“You men have been away a long time, and have much money due to you.”

“Ai!” assented the constables eagerly.

“A pity – I have eaten it,” declared the sergeant in the native idiom. “About turn. Quick march!” The men were not deceived; they went out chuckling.

4

All the exploring is not left to native constables. White officers and sergeants have ventured far into the sand

dunes of the “Great Thirst” in the south and the unmapped, unhealthy bush of the north.

I remember a sergeant pointing out certain places on the map which he had proved to be non-existent – water-holes and even mountains. During a long trek on horseback to the western frontier he rested beneath a lonely baobab tree and found the carved names of white men who had been there before. One was a hunter, and the date 1899. The others were German soldiers who had off saddled at that spot during the pursuit of the defeated Hereros in 1905, and then returned to their own territory. Not a sign or beacon marks this stretch of the old international frontier. The sergeant found a small settlement of Hereros, descendants of the people driven out of South-West Africa.

“What is that grass you wear on your head?” they asked. They had never seen the straight hair of a white man before.

The hospitality of officials and police at isolated centres of government in Bechuanaland is a memorable experience. I shall often think of the camp at Maun, under a great fig tree beside the Tamalakane River, where the birds went by in rocket bursts, the blue jays settled on the bushes, kingfishers in the river, Marabou storks and pelicans strutted in the green reeds.

Here within the thorn boma the police boys brought a tent with mosquito curtains and a bathroom. Tables and chairs appeared, and a box of paw-paws and oranges for the expedition that had come through the dusty desert. At night there were the frogs. “Kwa-kraw-dru-u-mm.” It was diffi-

cult in the dry, cool July weather to imagine the summer menace of malaria and the quinine sulphate pills at sundown. Yet my friend the sergeant lived in a netted enclosure on the veranda of his thatched house, and slept always beneath mosquito curtains.

In the fresh early morning the boy brings tea. A shout for water, a bath. Then a canter along the river bank while a crocodile raises a wary eye and sinks cautiously to await other prey. Breakfast, and a visit to the gaol to see the prisoners turn out for their day of brickmaking. Office duty, ration accounts, or a few hours in court as prosecutor occupy the sergeant's morning. Before lunch he changes into civilian clothes, according to the custom of the service. Drill on the square. At half-past four

in the afternoon, if there are no emergencies, the sergeant may take his shot-gun and bring down a few wild duck for dinner.

For a man who enjoys shooting there are few countries in the world offering such a variety and abundance of game. A sergeant on patrol receives twenty rounds of free ammunition a month to fill his pot. The allowance for a native constable is ten rounds, the idea at headquarters being either that natives are more accurate marksmen or that they need less meat. When there are many carriers to feed, a hippo or buffalo may be selected; at other times a springbok will suffice.

On mail days the police sergeant helps to sort the letters. He is postmaster, too, at small stations, and he may be called upon to inspect roads and deal with agricultural problems.

Before the mails were carried between Maun and Palapye by motor-lorry, pack donkeys were employed. They tell the story of an unhappy occasion when the donkeys were stampeded by a herd of zebras. His Majesty's mails disappeared into the bush, and though a long search followed the bags were never recovered.

At night in these outposts conversation has been widened by the radio. But after the news has come through and the loud-speaker has been switched off, the talk still returns to those queer, bygone characters who achieved local fame in adventures with lions or leopards, in alcoholic feats or repartee with high but unpopular officials. A man with a memory could make a book of one such evening's gossip. Such a work, however, would not find favour with my friend the sergeant,

and as I hope to see him again one day in a less remote atmosphere, I shall not attempt it. Only one who has spent years in that fascinating and little-known land to the south of the Zambesi can tell the full story of the Bechuanaland Protectorate Police.

CHAPTER 3

ALONG THE DUSTY RIVER

ALONG THE pioneers of the hot Kalahari frontiers was a race of half-caste people whose descendants still call themselves Bastards with pride.

Most of them are now firmly settled in the “republic” of Rehoboth, whither they trekked before the Germans came to South-West Africa. But there are other small colonies in remote corners. I met a group of these mixed people recently, living on the Nossob, the dusty river that runs through the Kalahari up to Union’s End and marks the border between the Cape Province and the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Titus Matthys, one of the many remarkable characters the race has produced, is their headman. I asked Titus to describe himself. “Ek is ’n

opregte Baster,” he replied. “I am a genuine Bastard.”

In the days when there were no colour problems, a white farmer who married a coloured woman received a grant of land along the Orange River with his bride. Many an adventurer helped to keep the European strain alive in a people who had mingled with Hottentot, Koranna and Griqua and yet formed a distinctive racial type of their own.

For many years, however, they have clung pathetically to their white ancestry; and, as a community, discouraged marriages with Hottentots and darker people.

Incidentally, the harsh name they selected does them an injustice. They have long been under missionary influence, and the unfortunate unions



A camp on the Nossob river.

of white and coloured of the early days were, as a rule, legal marriages.

Among the Bastard colony I visited in the Kalahari there was once a great hunter named Gert Louw. He was taken to England by the traveller Farini in 1885 and presented to Queen Victoria. "The people in London are like locusts for multitude," Louw declared when he returned to his desert home. This patriarch was more than a hundred years old when he died during the Great War.

It must have been an astounding journey for the coloured hunter. The village of the Bastards on the dry and dusty Nossob River has been established in territory which could only have been reached with great difficulty by motor-cars before the invention of the balloon tyre. The place is called Kyky, about two hundred and forty

miles northwards of Upington and seven hundred miles from Cape Town. I drove to Kyky over hundreds of sand-dunes and then went swerving and bumping along a river bed that had been torn up by floods. It is desolate country – a dangerous land indeed for the novice – into which the Bastards have retreated beyond the inevitable thrust of white settlement.

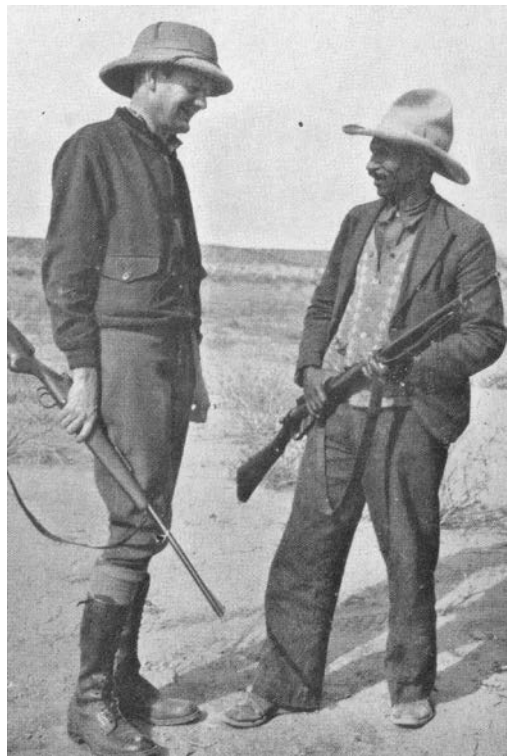
Although most of their contacts are with South Africa, these people live within the Bechuanaland Protectorate and pay hut tax to that administration. Once they had their own magistrates and veld-kornets – a self-governing community encouraged by the Cape Government as a barrier against rebellious Hottentots and raiding Korannas. A bold fighting race they must have been in the wild period of the 'eighties of last century. When the Hottentots,



A water-hole in the dry bed of the Nossob river, used by the half-castes.

under the notorious Pofadder, threatened them, the Bastards, led by Dirk Philander, defended their land successfully and lived on undisturbed. Philander was granted £25 a year by the Cape Government for ammunition. In South-West Africa the Germans followed the same policy. They made allies of the Bastards and received much help from them in campaigns against the Hottentots and Hereros.

Today the men still rely on their rifles as a means of livelihood. Titus Matthys has shot 51 lions and 84 leopards, each skin representing from £3 to £5 at the trader's store, besides a number of scars on his own body. Once he found a pair of young lion cubs and was carrying them off when the lioness appeared. He escaped by an old Bushman trick. First he threw down the sack of t'samma melons he



Author and Titus Matthys, leader of the nossob river half-castes. Titus had shot more than 50 lions and 80 leopards.

had been collecting. The lioness stopped to sniff the sack and then Titus set fire to the grass.

Last year he was riding beneath a Kameeldoorn tree when a leopard sprang on him from the branches. "I jumped off and shot it," Titus Matthys told me, fingering a scar on his neck. The Bastards are not an imaginative race. Titus is still ready to ride 50 miles when news of a leopard spoor reaches him. He married a daughter of the Philander family and has 28 children of his own. Others may trap the jackal or hunt the harmless kloosie with dogs; but Titus, with so many to maintain, seeks fiercer animals. This brown man with sunken cheeks, wide-brimmed hat, old clothes and veldskoens knows more of the desert than most explorers and naturalists have written.

One night in camp, when Titus had come over in quest of a glass of brandy, I turned on the radio receiver. He had heard it before, but after the music there came a voice from Cape Town speaking in Afrikaans. Titus was dumbfounded. He stared at the bright dial, uttered a weird high-pitched laugh and rolled on the ground. "Now that is something I can understand," he gasped at last. For the rest of the Afrikaans programme he remained on his haunches listening to the language of his people.

The Bastards of the Nossob have one of the finest hunting-grounds in the world at their back doors. In the wind-blown dunes, varying in colour from cream to vermilion-red, roam the gemsbok, the springbok, the wild ostrich and much other game for the pot. Cattle owned by the Bastards

grow fat on the t'samma melons that ripen on the sandy ridges. The Bastards have free meat and milk, and their skill as hunters secures for them such occasional luxuries as tinned foods. They will have to kill more of their own goats in future, however, for the Bechuanaland Government recently placed restrictions on gemsbok and springbok hunting. Vegetables, or even roots, form no part of their diet, and fruit is unknown. Meat is shared in the village, not sold by these primitive socialists.

During their hunting expeditions into "the sand" (as they call the desert), the Bastards have dealings with wild Bushmen and uncivilised Hottentots. Titus Matthys trades with the Bushmen – a stick of tobacco for a skin. He is in the position of a middleman exploiting the Stone Age. The



The author in the Kalahari after a springbok hunt.

Bushmen, he says, take their families with them when they rove the

unmapped desert to the east of the Nossob. Hottentot hunters travel alone, returning to villages where their wives await them.

Water becomes a problem almost of life or death in a dry season along the Nossob. At Kyky there are two wells, one in the village of rough huts, the other in the centre of the river-bed. Sometimes the village well dries up. Then water for the whole community and the cattle must be drawn up by the women, bucket after bucket, with never a break day or night, from the remaining source of water. It is a meagre supply, but the underground stream never fails. There is no more water for many miles up or down the river. Bushmen, of course, can rely entirely on the t'samma; but the Bastards need water and have become clever diviners and diggers of wells.

They go down to 150 feet, lowering a man with the aid of strips of leather cut from a gemsbok hide.

I learnt more of the ways of the Bastards from Willem, one of the Titus Matthys clan, who joined the expedition as camp servant. Willem was a lean, muscular little fellow who appeared to be able to stand any hardship until he found there was a doctor in our party. Then he developed a daily stomach-ache or rheumatism and showed keen enjoyment in swallowing medicine. As a rule the Bastards are without medical aid. Three or four visits a year by a government medical officer are all they can expect, and the people are so scattered that the doctor cannot reach them all. If an urgent operation is necessary, the patient usually dies. For lesser complaints, those famous South African remedies

known as “Old Dutch Medicines” are used with the faith that works miracles.

Willem was often cross-examined about the legendary “Lost City” of the Kalahari. Farini described the place in an illustrated book published after his return to London. Sketches by Farini’s son, who accompanied him, showed walls of dressed stone, fluted pillars and pavements. Many expeditions have searched for it in vain. Willem declared that he had heard of the “Lost City,” but had never seen it. The area in which may be situated is obviously, from Farini’s narrative, the dune country eastwards of the Nossob. An aeroplane might find it, if it exists, in a few days, but no aerial survey has yet been organised. One thing is certain – the area, unknown to white travellers, is crossed and re-crossed in every

good hunting season by Hottentots and Bushmen. Would these hunters talk of such a place if they found it? According to Willem they would not. There would be water, and also game, at this lesser Zimbabwe. The wild hunters would keep such knowledge secret.

As a tracker Willem never faltered. In his own country, he said, he recognised the shapes and colours of the dunes; he could find the way through long stretches of desert as easily as though the dunes were signposts. But he admitted the Hottentots possessed a far more acute sense of direction. They could walk through unfamiliar country without even looking at the sky. As for the Bushmen, they were never lost and they never died of thirst. Willem said that he could go two days without water after that he was finished.

When we spent a day shooting,

Willem always shook his head and deplored the waste of cartridges. In the land of the Bastards ammunition is carefully hoarded. One cartridge means one dead buck. I found that Willem was a poor judge of distances beyond about seventy-five yards. He had always stalked his game, and it had never occurred to him to risk a long shot and a miss. His philosophy about lions, I gathered, was that if a man was intended to be taken he would be taken. Nevertheless, it was a good thing to keep a loaded rifle handy "so that a man might help himself."

Willem slept in his patched clothes with a blanket beneath him and a thin kaross on top. On nights when our water bottles tinkled with ice I would wake up half frozen in my thick sleeping bag and see him crouched

over the fire, chewing tobacco, and thinking, no doubt, of his distant hut at Kyky and the stories of travel he would tell on his return.

A good, willing Bastard was Willem, descendant of hardy pioneers who guarded a frontier so that the white settlers of the Orange River might live in peace.

2

"Kalahari Gemsbok National Park." The noticeboard stands in one of the loneliest spots in South Africa, and it marks a game reserve that has been kept almost secret ever since it was proclaimed five years ago.

Five years hence, perhaps, some of the hundreds of thousands of people who know the world-famous Kruger National Park in the Transvaal will have travelled into the desert to see a

different wonderland of game. At present I cannot recommend the journey to everyone. The Kalahari is a pitiless territory. It finds the weak spots in motor-cars and human beings, too, and these dry spaces, where the shy gemsbok lift their long horns, are not easy to penetrate.

Without a guide a trip to the Kalahari National Park might end in disaster. Day after day a party of motorists might await rescue after a breakdown in vain, while their water supply gradually failed. The resourceful, careful, well-equipped motorist has nothing to fear. "When you get to the Kalahari you know what you can do," someone on the desert-fringe, told me. This unknown game reserve is still the Kalahari, an uncomfortable place to be stranded. And now, if you have not been discouraged by this warning, I

will tell you, how to reach it.

Upington, on the Orange River, is the gateway of the Kalahari, and from Upington there runs an incredible switchback road over hundreds of sand-dunes. Follow it for 200 miles and you will reach the southern tip of the reserve, where the Auob and Nossob rivers meet. These dusty rivers flow only once or twice in a century, forming rough highways through the Kalahari for the rest of the period.

Before you reach the reserve there is the Molopo, a watercourse that has been in full flood once since Livingstone saw it, in 1846, running strongly. The last flood was in 1934, and then it brought down shoals of mysterious fish and formed lakes among the dunes. When I passed that way in July, 1936, the farmers had just sown wheat – a sight which may not

be seen in the Kalahari again this century. Their enterprise was made possible by the fact that the Molopo had not followed its old course into the Orange, but had been dammed up by the sand-dunes, an effective barricade. This unexpected gift of water and rich silt consoled the stock farmers for homes swept away and cattle drowned in the driest area of South Africa.

After the Molopo, then, there is the Nossob, taking the traveller along the eastern boundary of the reserve to the lonely point called Union's End. There a beacon shows the meeting-place of three territories, the Union, South-West Africa and Bechuanaland. You can follow the Nossob for hundreds of miles, arriving at last in the old German outpost of Gobabis, a pleasant village near the eastern frontier.

It is an experience to be remembered,

this dry-river motoring beside the game reserve. Clouds of grey dust cover everything; and if there happens to be a car ahead of you the atmosphere of a London fog is created and driving becomes difficult. Fortunately there is no possibility of losing the way. The trees in the channel and the banks are your signposts. Now and again the route takes a short cut by rising out of the bed suddenly and diving over a great dune into the river again to avoid a sharp bend. But the Nossob is never far away. On the west there is the dry Auob, marking part of the reserve's western boundary, until it crosses the 20th parallel of longitude that cuts through Union's End. A queer arrangement, difficult to understand until you have seen the Kalahari Park or a good map. The area of the sanctuary, as defined by these rivers



The university of Cape Town expedition reaches the beacon at union's end. A lonely spot where the Union of South Africa meets the Bechuanaland Protectorate and South-West Africa.

and the straight line of longitude, is nearly two million acres. Within this reserve, among the kameeldoorn trees, on the pans and over the dunes, many thousands of gemsbok feed on the desert melons. The gemsbok population, I believe, is now officially estimated at about 100,00 head; while 70,000 springbok, 60,000 wildebeeste, 10,000 ostriches and about 300 lions vary the thirsty landscape. The eland, which appeared to be in danger of extinction, is finding a new lease of life there. Smaller buck are plentiful. Every living creature is protected by the law of the reserve. "You cannot even shoot a jackal," an old hunter told me regretfully.

Whether the law is effective is another question. The Nossob boundary marches, wriggles and bends with the Bechuanaland Protectorate frontier.

You can obtain a licence to shoot in Bechuanaland. Thus a few yards in the middle of the Nossob make all the difference between lawful hunting and criminal poaching of game. I camped at one spot on the Nossob called Grootkolk for three days, and during that time not one stranger appeared. Shooting in the reserve would have been safe and simple. In that solitude the noise of an approaching game-warden's car was never heard. Scores of wounded animals are found in the reserve, suggesting that reckless hunters are in the habit of invading the national park. It is obvious that a number of officials will have to be stationed along the dry rivers before the law can be enforced.

Nevertheless, the poacher risks a heavy fine whenever he crosses into the reserve with a rifle in his hand. If

the park had not been proclaimed large parties of hunters would have slaughtered the game, and by this time the gemsbok herds would have dwindled to a fraction of their present strength.

These gemsbok are worth preserving. You cannot see them in the Kruger Park – only in the dry territories do they flourish. Once they were found on the banks of the Orange River. Ruthless hunters drove them north, so that now they rove in large herds in this inaccessible corner of South Africa. Large and strong as horses they are, with their white-blazed faces, warm grey colouring and dark markings. Their horns are like spears. When you see a head lifted, so that only one horn is outlined against the sky, it is easy to trace the origin of the unicorn legend.

An airman passing over the reserve would notice the dunes all criss-crossed with narrow trails. These are the gemsbok paths, leading to favourite salt-licks, to places where many sharp hoofs have scratched out roots and moist bulbs and left the veld pock-marked. Some declare that the gemsbok never seek pools of water. I think it would be more correct to say that the gemsbok can exist for long periods in the desert without drinking. Moisture is obtained from the vegetation and stored up in the paunch. There is no doubt that the gemsbok possesses the power to survive in droughts that cause havoc among the rest of the game. A brown root called “eland wortel” sustains life in the gemsbok. During a dry season the wildebeeste may be observed following the more resourceful

gemsbok in search of this root.

Men dying of thirst have saved their lives by shooting a gemsbok and securing as much as three gallons of ill flavoured fluid. I tasted gemsbok milk on one occasion and hoped that I should never be driven to the more desperate substitute.

Several boreholes have been drilled along the rivers by the Government to provide water for man and game. Side-trips into the waterless interior of the reserve are not encouraged by the authorities, though a track of sorts crosses the northern portion. Water must never be forgotten by the traveller. There is one stretch of more than a hundred miles of the Nossob route where only a muddy pool may be found. Somewhere in this territory, I was told, there is a poisonous water-hole bearing a warning sign, a relic of

days when men staggered up to the spot with parched throats. "If you drink, you die," reads the notice scrawled on a board. "If you do not drink, you die. So drink."

The Auob River is the track favoured by the Government. There boreholes and windmills are more frequently encountered. The Nossob, in fact, has a futile notice-board at each end, stating that the route is closed – "Trespassers will be prosecuted." For years the prohibition has been ignored and motorists have passed freely.

Those who go lion-hunting with cameras will never find in this Kalahari reserve the pictures they secure with ease in the Kruger National Park. When the traveller Anderson trekked up the Molopo in the 'eighties of last century he wrote: "This is truly the lion veld; I have

counted at one time, in a troop, great and small, twenty-two, frequently six and seven in the middle of the day, and within a short distance of my wagons.” Now a spoor on the dunes is all most visitors will see of the lions that once made it dangerous for a man to leave his wagon without a rifle in his hand.

It is a land of adventure, indeed, that will one day be opened up for thousands of tourists. Mr. Piet Grobler, when Minister of Lands, was responsible for the creation of the reserve – a wise step taken only just in time. The area between the dry rivers had been surveyed for farms, and a few settlers had actually moved up there with their stock. Settlement would have meant the destruction of most of the wild life in a short period. Mr. Grobler compensated the farmers

and moved them away. The Kalahari National Park became a reality and a great asset of the future.

CHAPTER 4

THE LONELIEST WHITE SETTLEMENT

FAR out in the western Kalahari I came to the loneliest white settlement in Africa. This is Ghanzi, founded by Cecil Rhodes, forgotten after his death, but still struggling against isolation.

Ghanzi reminded me strongly of another remote colony I had seen, Tristan da Cunha. There are one hundred and sixty-seven white settlers at Ghanzi, about the same population as the South Atlantic island. Tristan is cut off from the outside world by more than a thousand miles of ocean; while Ghanzi lies beyond a waste of hundreds of miles of sand that only the most determined motorists care to tackle.

In the ox-wagon days, and even after the Great War, the mails took five months to reach Ghanzi. Then, no medical help could ever be obtained. Now the nearest doctor is 200 miles away, at Maun in Ngamiland. And even today the mails from Cape Town cover the last few hundred miles of the journey to Ghanzi on pack donkeys, arriving a month after posting.

White men have died of thirst along the track to Ghanzi, and some have perished with the poison of Bushman arrows in their veins. Aeroplanes have been sent out to find lost parties. A hard journey it was to Ghanzi, a weird country and a brave settlement at the end of the trail.

Most maps of the Bechuanaland Protectorate show Ghanzi not far from the great right angle that breaks the line of longitude forming the western

frontier. On some it is marked : “Boer Settlement,” which is only half correct. The covered wagons that reached Ghanzi on Christmas Eve, 1898, sheltered families of both Dutch and English descent, in equal numbers. News of good ranching country in this distant corner of the Kalahari had been brought to Cecil Rhodes by an explorer named Isaac Bosman. One or two other white hunters and traders had been in the territory during the 'nineties of last century; Robert Lewis, killed by a leopard; and the adventurous Van Zyl, a great elephant-hunter whose legendary hoard of buried gold and ivory is still sought in the Ghanzi district. Van Zyl built the first house at Ghanzi, long before the trek – a luxurious mansion with stained-glass windows and polished wood floors. He was ambushed and shot by the

Damaras not long afterwards, leaving as remote a home as ever man built in unmapped country.

Tales of the rich Ghanzi plateau, at all events, convinced Rhodes of the possibilities of establishing a white colony there. Added to this was an urgent political motive. The Germans in South-West Africa were looking enviously towards the empty land beyond their eastern border. A further expansion of territory would threaten the visionary's Cape-to-Cairo railway, whereas a buffer State under the Union Jack would protect that dream. So Rhodes made his offer to land-hungry, restless people in South Africa – free farms, each of 10,000 acres, water-boring machinery, full equipment for the desert trek, right down to pipes and tobacco, needles and cloth for the women, sacks of

meal and finally a gift of £200 for each family.

Sixty families gladly accepted the offer and gathered at points on the present Cape-to-Bulawayo railway line to set out on the westward journey. Of these three hundred brave souls only four or five are alive today. One of the survivors at Ghanzi gave me an impression of the trek, the long series of disasters when the people of the wagons left their dead under heaps of stones beside the trail.

Lightning killed a man and his wife, leaving their baby untouched. Rinderpest took toll of the cattle. Sometimes heavy sand-dunes barred the route, so that the wagons could not cover half a mile a day. Water was the thought that filled the minds of all of them in that heat-laden wilderness. Often the tiny wells dug by Bushmen yielded a scant

and grudging supply. Limestone pans they expected to find full were almost dry. There were muddy holes where the last dregs of water were poisonous. On each thirsty stretch some of the weakest travellers died.

Bushmen attacked the weary column and were driven off. Daring young men wandered away from the wagons and were lost for ever in the bush or taken by lions. Then, in the swamp region, came malaria, and the names of more victims of the trek were carved on the baobabs. Fortunately the natives were friendly; they had never seen white faces before. By this time the journey was nearly over – the journey that had lasted seven months – and the wagons turned south towards the plains of Ghanziland. Beside Ghanzi Pan they halted and gave thanks for their safety. But even then

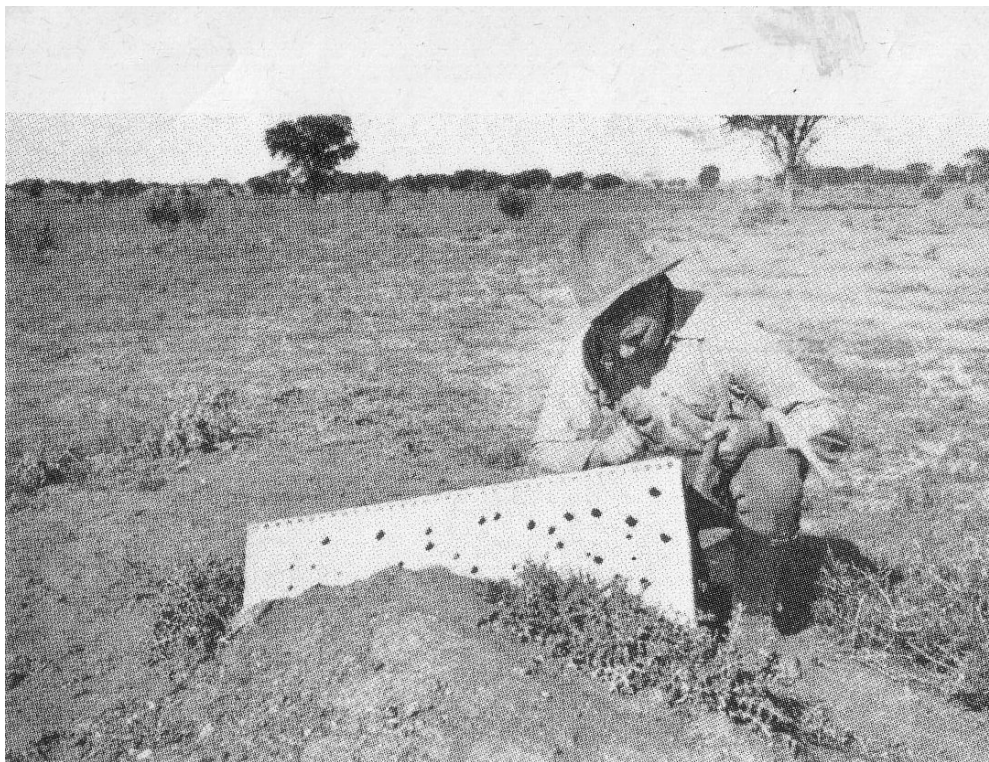
the strain of the journey had not ended. Several of the old people who had come so far were buried in the new settlement.

After the trek came fresh troubles. To the west the Germans were at war with the Hereros and Hottentots. To the east, unknown to the Ghanzi settlers, the South African War was being fought, and stores, eagerly awaited, were not sent forward. For many months the people lived without tea or sugar. Rhodes died, the remote colony at Ghanzi, that might have flourished under his care, was neglected for years. Families became discouraged and abandoned the Promised Land to join those other adventurous spirits, the "Thirstland Trekkers," bound for the highlands of Angola. Only about twenty families remained at Ghanzi.

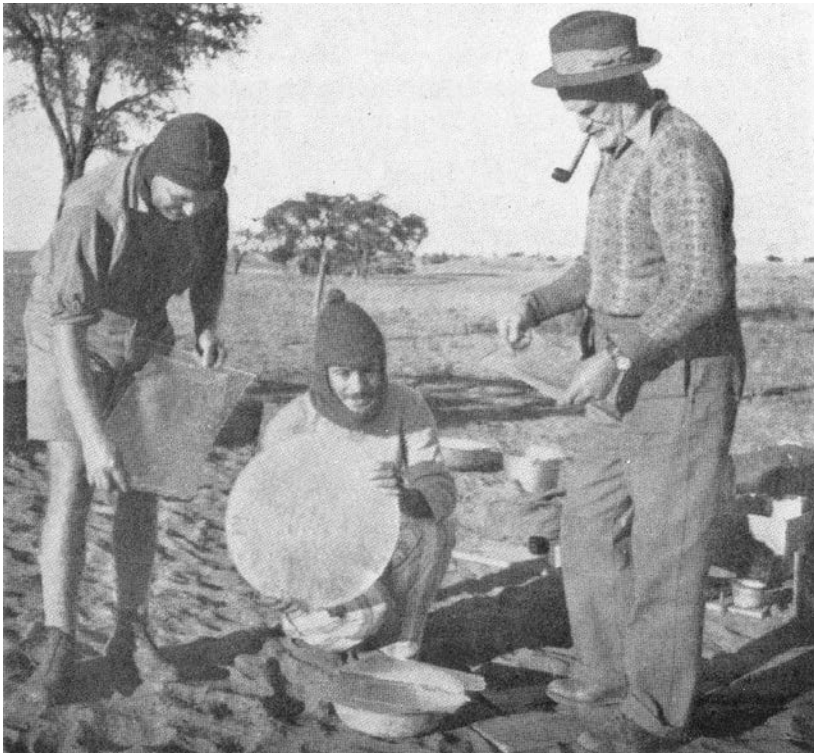
The descendants of these hardy settlers

of 1898 were far more comfortable, if not entirely prosperous, when I reached Ghanzi with the University of Cape Town Kalahari expedition in July, 1936. We travelled in motor-car by the route used for all fast transport to the settlement. It is still merely a rough track from Gobabis in South-West Africa, across the frontier at the Sandfontein police post, through Olifant's Kloof, where van Zyl shot a hundred elephants (all bogged and unable to escape) in one day. Olifant's Kloof is now a Bechuanaland Protectorate Police station, a bleak spot where the cold, stone houses overlook a great area of almost barren plain.

From this lonely spot the route cuts back into South-West Africa at Fort Rietfontein, once a German outpost held with difficulty against the



Water tank pierced by bullets at an old German outpost in the Kalahari. Visited by the author.



Ice in the Kalahari. Members of the University of Cape Town Expedition demonstrate how cold the desert can be at night in the winter.

Hereros; now only ruins, visited by Bushmen, so far from law and order that it is officially described as "outside the police zone." There the expedition filled water bottles at a permanent spring, camped near the old stone barracks, and drove on early next morning to the first homestead in the Ghanzi block of forty-two farms.

The centre of the settlement is the magistrate's office and post office. There is no village. At first the geography is baffling, for Ghanzi is a farm name, and the scene of government is actually at Gemsbok Pan, some miles away. Apart from wireless receivers owned by the magistrate and police sergeant, and the fortnightly donkey mail, there is no communication with the outside world, one way or the other. No telegraph or telephone line. No air mail, though a windsock

flutters on Gemsbok Pan and a veterinary official flew there during the "foot-and-mouth" epidemic. With a magistrate in residence, however, it is no longer necessary for young couples to travel 500 miles to Mafeking for a marriage ceremony. The journey takes four days by motor-car, but there are few wealthy farmers and just six cars. One new settler has arrived to take up land during the past two years. Nearly all the people of Ghanzi remain in the territory year after year, going to Mafeking only when the cattle are driven to market. A perilous business this, for in a dry season hundreds of head fall along the desert route. They go south from Ghanzi to Lehututu, then west to the railway line. A "thirst" of 135 miles is rushed in four days. When the veld is good, however, the cattle reach

Johannesburg, their final destination, in excellent condition. Goats and pigs thrive at Ghanzi, and recently the karakul has been introduced, the black Persian lamb that has made so many farmers in South-West Africa prosperous.

Nearly 2000 Bushmen, male and female, are employed on the farms in the 50,000 square miles of the Ghanzi district. It was estimated at the census, taken with more than fair accuracy this year, that there were another 8000 Bushmen living in their wild and primitive state in the area. Along the frontiers of South-West Africa I heard constant complaints about Bushman cattle raiders. Bushmen were shot at sight in the German times; even now the police patrols are always hunting the little bow-and-arrow men as a result of stock thefts. But at Ghanzi

the settlers speak well of the Bushmen. I saw the small men with humorous, wrinkled faces drawing water at the wells and bringing in the flocks at sunset. The gaol was almost empty.

“You can take a Bushman’s word when he is charged with a crime” an official told me. “Murder or stock theft, it makes no difference – if he denies committing the crime you may be sure he is not guilty.”

The Bushmen are of four clans, Monarwa, Mokwikwi, Xgon and the lighter-coloured, wilder Makoko. Even today little is known of the Makoko country. They say that large diamonds and an arrow tipped with gold have been seen in the possession of Makoko Bushmen. Let me warn prospectors – the police know little or nothing about the land of the Makokos, and the Bushmen are still ready to attack

strangers.

The pioneer atmosphere, indeed, still clings to Ghanzi. Cattle kraals have formidable stockades, lions are shot within four miles of the magistrate's office. Girls grow up in the saddle and know how to handle a rifle. The farms are so scattered that the people look forward to meeting at the post office on mail day. A dance is a rare event. Shopping, apart from a few essentials kept at the one small store, means sending orders out of the country and paying, a transport charge of ten shillings a hundred pounds weight. There is no hotel, and a case of beer is an expensive item by the time it reaches Ghanzi.

Education, however, has never been neglected. A schoolmaster accompanied the original trekkers, and now there is a school for white children

besides two native schools. It is pleasant to record the fact that this small colony of English and Dutch descent has never known racial differences. They have endured so many hardships together that they have become one body living in complete harmony. They still face the same difficulties and dangers. Every summer there is the malaria. Every dry winter the wells must be deepened to overtake the receding water. Always there is the problem of finding markets for the cattle.

A long track it is to lonely Ghanzi, a sandy track that wriggles through the yellow grass while thorn-bushes scrape the paintwork of the car, and ridges send the back wheels up in a choking flurry of dust. Here the wild ostriches roam, the springbok pause in groups to watch the passing traveller.

Bushmen, too, stare from their hiding-places, but are seen only when they think the traveller is a friend with tobacco to give them. Ghanzi with its stone walls and gardens, windmills and glossy cattle, is the Kalahari in a mellow mood. Only those who have seen the grim land separating Ghanzi from the outer world can realise the price the early trekkers paid for possession of their remote acres.

2

Within living memory the blue pool marked Lake Ngami on all large African maps was indeed a mighty sheet of water. Yet in July, 1936, I drove one of the motor-cars of the University of Cape Town Kalahari Expedition across the hard turf of Ngami. Somewhere in this waterless sea I shot an ostrich for the meat hungry Batawanas. Never a puddle of



Cutting up an ostrich shot by the author.

water did I observe in all that wide expanse of yellow grass and reeds.

David Livingstone was the first and also the last white man to see Lake Ngami in all its glory. “We could detect no horizon where we stood... nor could we form any idea of the extent of the lake except for the reports of the inhabitants of the district,” wrote Livingstone. That was in 1849, and since then an astonishing geographical change has occurred – all the more remarkable because the natives of the territory appear to have been responsible for it. The transformation of the Kalahari and its water system is still a controversial subject among scientists, of course, though much has been done towards solving the mystery. The fact remains that Lake Ngami has vanished in our own

times. As the Bushmen said: “The lake dried up and the dead fish and animals were devoured by the vultures.”

Nevertheless, the Ngami region has lost none of the primitive fascination that drew the old explorers there at the risk of their lives. In the unchanged forests round Ngami I found it easy to imagine men like Baldwin, the hunter, eating roasted giraffe and loading their wagons with ivory three-quarters of a century ago. Then Ngami was the “Ultima Thule” of bold spirits. Today it is still beyond the experience of all but the most determined African travellers. Even the air pilots who look down on many remote wonders of Africa do not pass that way.

Rumours of Ngami were carried by natives to the outside world long before the journey that was to become Livingstone’s first step to fame. One

may ask, indeed, whether some unknown member of “the lone grey company before the pioneers” did not follow the legend to its source years before the official discovery. At all events, Ngami was the first of the great lakes of Africa to be placed on the map, and cartographers have not seen fit to indicate that it is now a mirage. Extravagant stories and the actual shrinking of the lake caused disappointment among the early travellers. They expected to hear the roaring of an inland sea and found instead a shallow stretch of bitter water. Once, it is clear, the lake was so wide that the natives feared to cross it in dug-out canoes. Sudden winds must have been responsible for hundreds of drownings when Ngami was a lake. Yet five years after Livingstone’s arrival, Anderson saw a low expanse

of water only nine miles wide. Anderson’s wagons made the first tracks of the Ngami trail from Walvis Bay. It is a highway that ranks with the Old Hunter’s Road to Rhodesia, the Lake Chad ivory road and those other safari paths and caravan routes of Africa staked out, every mile of them, with skeletons and the memories of bygone adventurers. Along the Ngami trail went Chapman and the rest, taking beads and copper, gunpowder, sugar and clothes; struggling along with the “fever and ague” for which they had no proper remedies; and then returning with tusks cut from elephants caught by the natives in pits. At that period a trader might be out of touch with his friends at the Cape for three years, while no word of him save rumours of his death drifted westwards to the coast. I covered the ground from

Gobabis, the railhead in South-West Africa, to Ngami in three days by motor-car. The track is much as Chapman left it, but the modern car ruthlessly driven is capable of penetrating every sandy wilderness and stretch of bush in Africa.

I had heard of the disappearance of Lake Ngami from a previous visitor, who informed me with vigour that “Ngami no more resembles a lake than a penny whistle resembles an orchestra.” Other members of the expedition were not prepared for the dry yellow reality. As far back as 1896, however, Lugard and Passarge trekked to a waterless Ngami. They established the fact that Ngami had finally dried up in 1890, and gathered from the natives the explanation.

A powerful chief, it seems, had his stronghold among the rocks at the

southern extremity of the lake. Every year the weaker tribes of the Okavango brought him tributes of corn. They transported the corn on rafts of papyrus grass – large reed platforms built with such skill that cattle, human beings and freight could all travel on them. Such rafts were abandoned at the end of the journey and the grass took root in the mud of the river bank. As a result, streams that had run freely were gradually blocked with vegetation, channels silted and rivers ceased to flow into Ngami.

That, queer sequence of events, however, formed only half the story. Guns and gunpowder sold by the early traders now enter the drama. Before the coming of the white man, enormous herds of hippo lumbered about the rivers and the lake, breaking through the thickest tangle of grass

like armour-plated battering-rams. Fire-arms thinned out the hippos and drove many a herd northwards into the swamps. As the natives themselves made no effort to carry out the work previously done for them by the hippos, Ngami became the grassy plain it is today. Only in years of great floods do the rivers now overflow sufficiently to send a stream across Ngami. Nothing but a gigantic irrigation scheme would convert Ngami into the lake twenty miles long by ten miles wide that Livingstone saw. Meanwhile the blocking of rivers by rafts continues in the Okavango region – territory so remote that many of the island dwellers have never seen a white man. Efforts by the Government on a small scale to clear certain rivers, however, have been successful. The Tamalakane River now flows past

the Resident Commissioner's house at Maun as it did years ago, watering many a field of flourishing crops.

There is another legend of the Ngami transformation worth relating, even though it may not be accepted as the full explanation. During the sixties of last century, it is said, the Paramount Chief of Ngamiland, named Morimi, became desperate as a result of cattle raids by hostile Bechuanas, slave raids by Arabs, and the disturbing visits of white hunters. Morimi decided to create a barrier against invaders. He led his tribe to a narrow section of the Okavango River and felled hundreds of palm-trees, so that the leaves dropped into the stream. The flotsam of the river completed the task. As time passed the trees accumulated debris, a barrage was formed; and the waters of the Okavango, instead of

reaching Lake Ngami, were thrown back and became a great delta. Here was an obstacle that deterred raids from the north. The drying up of the lake sent the game away seeking greater waters, thus discouraging the white elephant-hunters. It is true that the richest variety of game is now to be found in the swamps, though the expedition I accompanied never went hungry in the Ngami wonderland of small buck and birds.

Some authorities, notably the late Professor Ernest Schwarz, have stated that the rainfall of South Africa has decreased since the waters left Ngami. "South Africa is becoming a Sahara," they say. Ingenious schemes for restoring the lake and watering the whole Kalahari have been worked out in detail. These plans would cost millions, and no government is likely

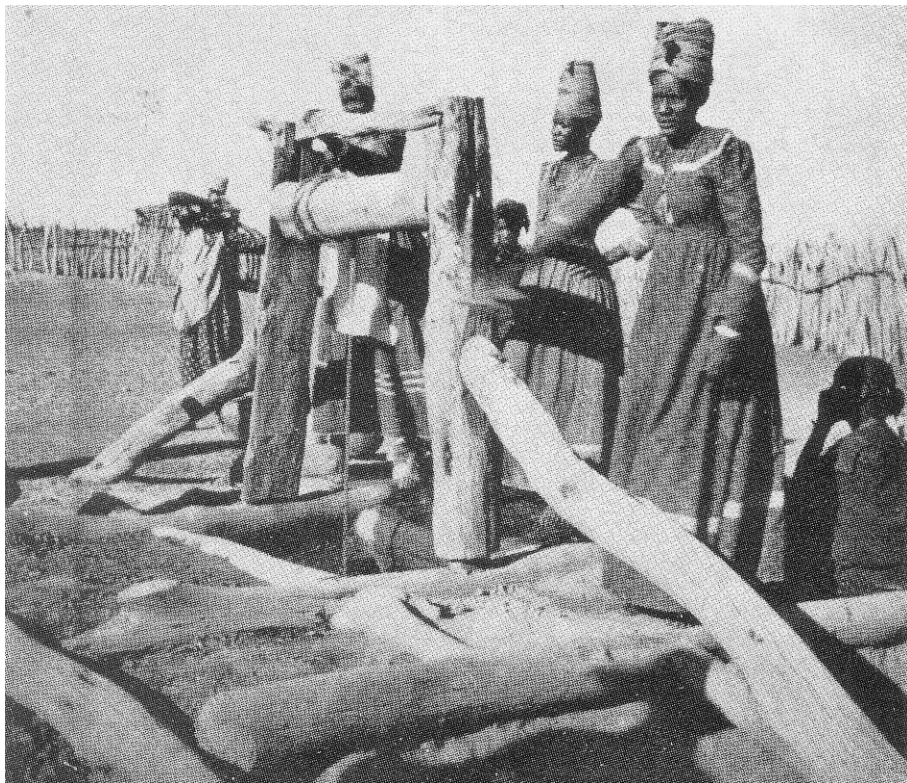
to spend millions to test a theory. The water system is intricate, and maps are unreliable. A high Bechuanaland official told me that he was unable to grasp the baffling topography until he had flown over the swamps seven times. It is thought that the great Zambesi once fed Ngami, for the ancient area of the lake was 50,000 square miles. A faint river course has been traced leading out of Ngami in a southerly direction and joining at last with the mighty Orange. That is the link between the "lost lake" and the climate of South Africa. Unfortunately the weather records do not go back very far, and it may well be that the present dryness is part of a natural cycle of two centuries or more. One cannot ignore the native legend which says that some time before 1800 there was no lake.

Magnificent crops of mealies, corn, tobacco and cotton are grown in the old lake area in spite of the lack of surface water. Round the shore, where waves thrown up by storms once pounded, there live several distinct races of people who found refuge there from wars and oppression. The most prosperous are the cattle-owning Hereros, five thousand exiles with their principal village at Sehitwa. They arrived about thirty years ago – the parched and haggard survivors of a savage nation that had fought the Germans in South-West Africa.

For years that merciless desert war had been waged. The resistance of the Hereros to the German rule was fierce; at last Von Trotha issued his desperate extermination order. In the final drive six divisions were flung against the retreating Hereros in a great arc to

prevent them from escaping into the Bechuanaland Protectorate with their cattle. One night the German colonial troops, marching in brown cord uniforms with their ox-teams and wagons, sighted the fires of the great Herero camp. But in the morning the pursuing Germans saw only skins and pots, and in the distance a pillar of dust. The proud Hereros, abandoning everything, had fled into the desert. They made grass fires to delay the chase. Here and there German patrols followed the line of flight. Several patrols ventured too far and died of thirst.

Among the Hereros the desert exacted a heavy toll. The survivors found a route along an old watercourse; they dug up a few moist roots and sucked the t'samma melons where they came upon them; but there was never



Herero women drawing water at Sehitwa. Note the Victorian fashions, still popular among these strange exiles.

enough water for that broken legion, and men, women and children dropped by the score day after day. How many came at last to the sanctuary of the Ngami water-holes it is impossible to say. There were no white officials in Ngamiland at that time. Those who reached Ngami with the last of the Herero cattle soon regained their strength and founded a colony in which the tribal traditions and customs remained unchanged. There I saw the women wearing the three-pronged cowhide head-pieces that have almost vanished in South-West Africa. They show an excessive fondness for bangles and metal decorations, weighing themselves down with tubing and coils of brass wire. Others were dressed in Victorian clothes, with tight waists and flowing skirts. The first German missionary women to reach Herero

land wore such clothes, and the native women have copied the old fashion year after year ever since, even in exile. On that far shore the tall Hereros still worship their ancestors and keep their holy fires blazing. The hunting is good, they have their beehive huts, their milk and grain, horses and guns. Small in numbers among the teeming Batawanas, these Hereros, with their memories of old conquests, have secured a dominant position. The best cattle and the finest land are-theirs.

A few humble Berg Damaras live with their masters, the Hereros, in the Ngami territory. Queer folk, the negroid Berg Damaras, speaking the Hottentot language, knowing nothing of their own origin. For centuries they were slaves, a weak and primitive people without leaders of their own. Even their religion is lost. Yet they

possess one art the Hereros have never known, the ability to work in iron. They say that the name Herero is really the sound of a spear whirring towards the enemy. But when a Herero needs a spear, and nowadays when his muzzle-loader is broken, he must go to the Berg Damara craftsman.

Once the Batawana tribe lived near the lake. There is an alarming custom in this country, however, that when the old chief dies his kraal and khotta must be burnt and his followers move away to some other place. For this reason the Bechuanaland maps give the impression of busy highways pleasantly dotted with villages where the traveller may seek refreshment. Often I thought I lost the way as I drove through Ngamiland with my map of vanished settlements. In 1915, I learnt, the Batawanas had abandoned

their lake “capital” and moved 50 miles eastwards to the present seat of government at Maun. The British officials, always anxious to humour a native whim, moved with them and built a new Imperial Reserve; but they informed the chief that there must be no more sudden changes. Batawanas still inhabit the woods of Ngami. These offshoots of Khama’s tribe are idle folk, supported by the cattle they inherited, wearing European clothes, harmless enough, but without charm, in their semi civilised state.

Finally there are the Bayeye, the fishermen who once caught their food in Lake Ngami and now exist more or less as Bushmen. They talk the Bushman language. To them the lake is “gabe” or “n’gabe,” the Giraffe Lake, a clear indication of the origin of the name. Giraffes still feed among the

kameeldoorn trees that share the landscape with grotesque baobabs and umbrella-shaped mimosas. But the hippos that were flung on to the shores of Lake Ngami in stormy weather have departed. No crocodiles await their victims in the reeds. Somewhere in the forest there may be a wizened old Bushman who saw Livingstone standing in wonder at the edge of the great water. But the Lake Ngami that Livingstone gazed upon is now only a memory of the very old people of the lake, a sight Africa will not see again.

CHAPTER 5

GRIM DESERT CAVALCADE

DAYBREAK on The Kalahari Fringe. As I woke and drew in the first deep breaths of the great, pure, desert air, a familiar cavalcade swung past. I unbuttoned my sleeping bag to watch and salute them – the men of the camel patrol, South-West Africa Police.

The helmeted, khaki-clad leader was a sergeant, rolling and jerking in the saddle as he set the “sandshuffle” pace of eight miles an hour, the least nerve-racking of all camel speeds. Then the dark-skinned orderlies, coloured men and natives with their felt hats and blue jackets, rifles, small iron water-tanks, blankets and rations.

A wave, a smile and they passed my hunting camp to cover their day’s

“beat” of 40 miles on camel-back; 40 hot and tiresome miles to inspect cattle and collect taxes from unwilling dwellers in “the blue”; to report invading swarms of locusts, hear the latest story of Bushman wickedness, or gather unpalatable facts for the agricultural census. Such is the routine of camel patrols over this vast territory, from the unmapped Kaokoveld south to the parched mountains of the Orange River, and from pleasant Swakopmund eastwards to the frontier beyond Gobabis. From post to remote post the camels make their complaining way. “Oooh!” they grumble, even at feeding time. But for the riders there is always a prospect of adventure over the next sand-dune – encounters with wild animals and wilder men. The life in remote corners of South-West Africa today is very

much the life men knew in South Africa a century or more ago. Those far corners, stretches of dangerous country like the diamond coast and the deserts; those are the places where even the balloon tyred motor-car is not so useful as the camel. There I have found the men of the camel patrol at home, I have shared their coffee with them and heard tales that were new, but which would have been old tales in any other land.

Witdraai, down in the southern Kalahari in Union territory, is a good starting-point for this leisurely trek on camel-back through the vast brown spaces, broken by thorn trees, sometimes by mountains, cut across by sand-choked rivers, and bordered on the west by the enormous dunes of the Namib – the fascinating spaces of South-West Africa. Witdraai is a

training station for police camels. Early this century, when civilisation spread to these hot frontiers, the thirst and heat killed horses, and pedigree camel bulls and cows were imported from the Sudan. With them came Sudanese attendants, so that the word of command “khoosh!” was heard in southern deserts, and fresh victims learnt the tricks of the camel trade. The Germans, too, imported camels from Fuerteventura in the Canaries for their dry colony, just as they brought Kroomen from West Africa to work their surf boats at Swakopmund. Both suited the peculiar needs of the country.

A sergeant who trained camels at Witdraai once pointed out to me certain characteristics of the camel which I have never seen set out in quite the same way in the more

scientific works. “A camel is a mixture of animals,” declared the sergeant. “Look at those hind-quarters – it might be a goat. The lip is split like a hare. It has the legs of a buck, the neck of a sheep, the hair of a squirrel. And the camel is the only tame beast – if you can ever call one tame – that still possesses the cunning and health and instincts of a wild creature. The eyes and nose show what living in deserts for centuries will do. You don’t see any sand in the silly-looking eyes of a camel.

The sergeant also gravely discussed such camel maladies as the dropsy called “zaharbahad,” the stomach-ache “guffa” and “taplarja” fever.

Training camels is one of the most arduous tasks the police service offers the unwary. It starts when a calf is about three years old – hardier at that

age, though a little smaller, than the camels of Arabia and Egypt. Long before that their noses have been bored. Now the first manoeuvre is to corner the young camel and tie its feet so that the wooden peg about three inches long, forming part of the “steering gear,” can be placed in the nose. The new recruit is then ready to accompany patrols on a lead and without a saddle. Thus habits of discipline are acquired, so that when the day for mounting the camel for the first time arrives, the riders hope that the results will not be violent. Meanwhile the camel carries bags of sand, and afterwards pack-saddles and provisions. This gradual breaking in is spread over a couple of years. The provisions come last because camels at this stage have a habit of vanishing into trackless desert, leaving the con-

stable in charge to explain the loss of government property to headquarters, where the whims of camels are not always fully understood.

Nevertheless, there are always a number of semi trained camels “present and correct” when the time for saddling-up arrives. It is a sight which showmen have neglected – an unknown desert rodeo that would draw crowds in the cities. Held down by clever Hottentot servants, the camel screams and groans. The new type of saddle has the tree so constructed that there are four points of suspension, giving even weight distribution and a proper seat for the rider. Nothing touches the spine – the rider is actually supported five inches above it – and the hump is caged in to prevent injury. But in spite of all improvements, the ungrateful camel prepares to reveal its

tremendous strength. The moment of release usually means a sensational moment, both for rider and onlookers, when the camel twists and, plunges in fretful abandon. Seldom does it buck cleanly and honestly like a horse. Never will the camel “swop ends.” The swinging head and calculating teeth must be watched; now and throughout the camel’s working life. No policeman comes through this, ordeal without cursing the camel in both English and Afrikaans – and in South-West Africa the third official language, German, is also brought into play. When an unbroken camel cannot unseat the rider, a favourite device is to rush beneath the limbs of a thorn bush and sweep the man away. No human lip ever sneered more effectively than the camel’s after a success of this kind.

There is a tragic side to the routine of camel training. Many lives have been lost, while there is no station along the Kalahari border that has escaped without severe casualties. At the Hofmeyr post I heard the story of a constable who found his forearm in the mouth of a vicious stud camel bull. The camel swung the man from side to side, using him as a flail, until the flesh gave way and the man, suddenly released, fell clear over the kraal wall. He had sufficient strength left to reach the mess-room and shut the door. This was fortunate, as the camel followed and would undoubtedly have killed him.

Camels, of course, must be taught to kneel. The technique in South-West Africa consists of a rope made fast to one foreleg and pulled from behind at the word of command, while a man in

front taps the other foreleg with a stick. Having learnt to kneel, the obstinate camel will sometimes refuse to rise. There is a true story of a constable on a long desert patrol whose camel knelt at a water-hole and would not continue the journey. In despair the constable wheedled the camel with the last of his dates, but still the long and hairy face expressed disgust and the determination to go no farther. Hunger forced the man to shoot the camel and live on the meat until help reached him.

Camels look streamlined and lean; in reality the loose skin covers masses of fat, and the men of South-West African outposts obtain tubs of pure soap from the humps of dead camels.

Police rations for camels in camp consist of oathay – 28 lbs. per camel a day. On the veld, however, the spiky

kameeldoorn tree provides the ideal food, eked out by a diet of "twa-grass" or mimosa. Nothing is too sharp for the long teeth and hard palate. The t'samma melon that saves so many lives in the Kalahari, this football-sized melon with its unpleasant rind is swallowed almost whole by the voracious camel. Exhaustion may kill camels; hunger and thirst seldom do. They will plod on, rumbling, gurgling, belching, complaining to the last, but nearly always bringing the patrol safely to the end of the trail. Water that horses would not touch is noisily imbibed by the camel with only the usual protests. I have seen a thirsty camel take a measured eighteen gallons of water within half an hour, enough for several days. It is a fallacy, however, to suppose that water may be obtained by the drastic method of

killing and opening one's camel. A thirsty camel when operated upon reveals the same lack of fluid as the human optimist who seeks water in this way.

The police records in South-West Africa show that camels have often covered fifty miles a day for five consecutive days without water. There was an Australian-bred camel in the southern Kalahari that carried the mails regularly over a distance of a hundred miles in half a day. I found it difficult to find accurate records of the longest camel run ever achieved within twenty-four hours in the territory; but General Gordon's famous ride of 143 miles in that time from Korosko to Abu Hameb must have been equalled in emergencies in South-West Africa. On such occasions the riders suffer as much as the

camels. The motion of a camel at the gallop is so irritating that men never become used or even resigned to it. Constables in other lonely places love their freedom and yearn – while on leave at the seaside – to return to their beloved horses and desert splendour. The men of the camel patrol, however, need their rest; the jarring effect on the nerves is not easily shaken off. Sudanese warriors may love their camels; white policemen never do. Constant swaying affects the strongest stomach. A weary sergeant once informed me that the camel was not called “the ship of the desert” because of its usefulness as transport. It was the heavy rolling that suggested the similarity!

Transport apart, there seems to be no new use for the camel. Some years ago the Union Government found their

camels were breeding too rapidly. It was feared that the surplus would become as dangerous as the Australian “camel plague,” when thousands of stray camels ranged over the “outback” farms devouring the grass. So farmers in South Africa were offered camels free, and a number along the Orange River accepted the gift. Strange indeed it was to see camels drawing (or refusing to draw) the ploughs on the river lands. In sandier soil the experiment might have succeeded, but the ground was too heavy for them and most of the gift camels were shot.

One hard-bitten old desert rover escaped this fate by wandering away from the farm at night, reaching unsettled country and heading down river to the sea. The coast is desolate, and the camel appears to have avoided

observation until it reached the Olifant's River mouth, 250 miles south of the Orange. Among the simple people of these parts the camel is merely a legend. Thus a small boy herding his father's sheep came running terrified to the homestead and announced: "The devil has come up out of the sea."

The farmer and his sons barricaded the door, armed themselves and peered through the window. As the apparition came lolloping into view over the rise the farmer raised his rifle.

"Don't shoot," exclaimed one of the boys. "I know that thing – I have seen it in books. It is a camel." The camel was spared and placed in the village pound at a spot called Vlermuisklip. For days it was the main centre of interest in the district as it stood gloomily munching and returning dis-

dainfully the stares of the wondering farmers.

More amusing (though, perhaps, less accurate) is the story of a German submarine commander who accepted the traditional gift of a camel from a North African sheikh during the War. The camel was lashed to the deck near the conning-tower, and when it was necessary to dive the order was given: "Submerge to camel depth!" Fishermen reported a weird sea monster soon afterwards – a hairy head that cut through the waves and showed its fangs as it raced past them.

In South-West Africa, however, camel stories are usually grim. There was a sergeant at Rehoboth, the reserve for those Biblical half-castes who give the government so much trouble; a sergeant whose territory covered all

the Namib Desert west of Rehoboth to the sea. Now the Namib is a veritable waterless desert with dunes 400 feet high, unlike the Kalahari, which is habitable in rainy seasons. In the Namib a man relies on the water he carries, for rain never falls.

“I had to take charge of a camel party on a trek through the Namib to the coast-diamond case,” recalled the sergeant. “We had with us a coloured man who had been charged with poaching diamonds and had turned King’s Evidence. My job was to find out where he had discovered the diamonds, and he was supposed to point out the spot.

“Six days it took us, over the dunes, leaving sealed drums of water at different caches every day to drink on the way back. No one had expected a journey of six days, but it was literally

unknown territory. Trouble was that the dunes were treacherous – we had to pull the camels over the steep sides and then urge them up the next sandy hill. We were walking in our helmets and shirts, nothing else, instead of riding. Walking for six days. One camel died on the way, but we got through to the sea.

“Foolishly we were relying on the diamond poacher to guide us through the dunes. He stayed with us long enough to make us careless about watching him – it seemed impossible to escape in that glaring waste of sand. But he had no intention of giving his rich diamond field away. When we woke up after the first night at the seaside the man had disappeared.

“It was a hard struggle back to Rehoboth with the camels – another six days that I don’t like to think

about. I had a compass, of course, and that saw us across the dunes; but it did not lead us to the water drums. We found only one. That man had been hammering and battering at it – and had failed to open it. For a long time we heard nothing of the diamond poacher – thought he must be dead. But the other day learnt he was alive. He walked all that way without water and survived, and the police are still looking for him. I never heard of any other man who could beat the camels at their own game, but that diamond poacher did!”

Even after a long spell of service in the sweltering hinterland the prospect of sea air brings no joy to the policeman ordered to patrol this desert coast. It is a sinister and menacing coast, littered with wrecks, often swamped with cold fog, while the

traveller must be constantly on guard against prowling beach jackals, leopards and the occasional lion.

A shipwreck, of course, means much work for the police, though crews of castaways are usually rescued by tugs and surf-boats, so great are the difficulties of an overland journey. During the Great War someone, inspired by the high value of ships, suggested that a stranded German steamer, the *Edward Bohlen*, might be salvaged from her sandy grave at Conception Bay. One of the police constables who accompanied the salvage experts gave me an impression of the journey down the dreaded coast from Walvis Bay.

“Eighty miles,” he said. “It does not sound much, but the dunes were ‘running’ in the strong wind – tons of sand toppling down after us as we

rode. Often we were almost buried. At high tide we had a choice of the treacherous dunes and the breakers, with nothing between. A German camel patrol vanished on this route before the War, and we thought of them as the sand went thundering into the sea.

“One notorious spot called the ‘Black Wall’ held us up until low tide – the dunes are so high there that it would have been foolish to have risked a landslide. But we got through and found the old ship. She was in good condition all right, with the rust blown clean off her top-sides by the continual sand-blast. But she was half buried in sand and lying a hundred yards from high-water mark. It would have taken an army to dig her out and a fleet to tow her off. We rode back through the grit, the heat and the mirage with our

lips and noses cracking. The *Edward Bohlen* is still lying down at Conception Bay with a pack of jackals in the hold and a colony of cormorants on deck.”

Another tale of a desperate camel-ride concerns two constables, Lyons and Ackerman, on patrol in the wild, lonely country along the South-West Africa-Bechuanaland border. A pack of wild dogs attacked them. Both men fired. It would not have been difficult to beat off the dogs, but during the skirmish one of the camels bolted panic-stricken and made for a thorn-tree. The old trick, of course, but Lyons knew it and jumped from the saddle. He brushed against his rifle as he fell, and there was a bullet in his thigh when he reached the ground.

Constable Ackerman, firing occasional shots to keep the wild dogs off, tore up

his shirt, bandaged the wound and carried Lyons to the nearest tree. There he propped him up, put a rifle in his hands, ammunition and water beside him. It was not easy to leave the wounded man there, with the smell of blood attracting other wild creatures and the dogs still in the neighbourhood: But Ackerman had made the right decision, and he rode off for help.

The nearest place where a doctor could be found was Kuruman – 120 miles from the scene of the accident. There was an outpost called Donkerbos only 30 miles away, however, and Ackerman reached it in two hours; possibly a record camel-ride for the territory. Fortunately he found Government officials there, part of a “foot and mouth disease” cordon with a motor-car. They had to race

away in the wrong direction to find enough petrol for the long run to Kuruman; but late that night they returned to the tree where Lyons still sat, bleeding and in great pain, but alive. Twenty hours after the gun accident Lyons was carried into the hospital at Kuruman. An older man might not have survived the ordeal. Lyons, twenty-two, is back on patrol.

Seldom does a member of the camel corps grow so careless that he forgets to shake out his boots and helmet every morning on the veld in search of scorpions. It is a daily duty to remember, for though the scorpion’s sting does not kill a healthy man it causes more pain, and other disturbing symptoms, than some snake-bites. Somewhere north of the Orange River two policemen hobbled their camels one night and started gathering wood

for the camp-fire. One man received a scorpion sting in the hand. His companion applied the usual perman-ganate of potash remedy, but the poison had entered a vein and could not be checked. That night the constable sank into delirium, then rose suddenly from his blankets, seized his rifle and aimed a mad blow at his companion. This resourceful fellow remembered the handcuffs and succeeded in locking them. The fit of madness passed, but the suffering policeman was too weak to ride his camel. The other man made another painful decision – necessary in view of the limited water supply – lashed the sufferer to his camel and set off slowly to the police post. No wonder these men have so little to say about the ordinary hardships of a camel patrol.

Diamonds, as I have shown, have

been, and are still, responsible for long camel-treks in South-West Africa. I know the owner of a small ex-naval pinnace who planned a raid on the coast to the north of Swakopmund. Glance at the Admiralty sailing directions for this desert shore and you will find that it is roughly, inaccurately charted, a coast which has never been thoroughly explored, almost a terra incognita to this day. Yet before my friend in the pinnace left Table Bay the exact spot where he intended to land was known to the police. (One of the crew, I learnt long afterwards, had given the information and claimed the reward.)

I believe an aeroplane was sent to the desolate spot on the surf-beaten coast, but no landing ground could be discovered. So Sergeant Thomas, two white constables and two native

orderlies, set out on camels across 200 miles of sun-scorched wilderness to await the raiders. There were no roads to follow, no water-holes, no shade. They were exhausted when they sighted the blue Atlantic over the glaring dunes. Luckily for them the trek had been well timed. The pinnacle with the unsuspecting raiders arrived that afternoon, and the police in hiding watched my friend disembark a landing party.

It is not necessary in this part of the country to prove illicit possession of diamonds or even prospecting without a licence. The whole coast from the Kunene River to a point north of Swakopmund has remained sperrgebiet, forbidden territory, since the German days. Soon after they stepped on shore the raiders were arrested.

Arrested only in the technical sense,

however, for Sergeant Thomas knew the men could not be taken back overland. The water carried on the camels might (or might not) be sufficient for the police themselves; but prisoners and police alike would perish if they all went back together. Sergeant Thomas gravely took the names of the landing party and instructed them to sail back to Walvis Bay and report there. The police started on their weary journey and the cutter put to sea. All concerned saw death at their elbows – the police just got through with parched throats and dying camels, while the raiders nearly foundered in a gale – before they all met again before the magistrate. Fines of £40 a head settled the matter. The strange part of the affair (and many like it) is that no diamonds have ever been found at the particular spot

selected for the raid. My friend, the pinnacle owner, admitted to me afterwards that he went on the strength of a legend and for the sake of adventure. Members of the camel patrol have asked me earnestly to expose these diamond legends that lead to hardship, to adventure they do not seek, but never to riches.

In such a country the men of the camel corps do not boast that they always “get their man.” International frontiers, hostile tribes that even the Germans left untaxed, Bushmen who become invisible when pursued – these are the odds against them. They still talk of places inside or beyond “the police zone” in South-West Africa. On the hill above Windhoek stands the “Palace of Ink,” the administration building the Germans built; and there I have seen rough

maps and colourless official reports of great rides on camel-back far beyond the zone of law and order. I know of no corner of Africa where men still lead more adventurous lives than the constables who swing and roll on gawky legs across the dusty plains, the men of the camel patrol, South-West Africa Police.

CHAPTER 6

SOUTHERN LIGHTS

THE small motor-cruiser was pitching into the long swell 75 miles north of Cape Town, off one of the most dangerous coasts in the world. I was navigator, peering ahead through the aching South African sunshine in the hope of recognising a point on the chart marked as Cape Columbine.

To starboard, above the shimmering South Atlantic, rose the masts of the most recent wreck. Cap Rock, Tooth Rock, Jacob Rock were astern, safely passed; but other off lying pinnacles awaited us, a three-knot current was helping the twin engines, and I was anxious to fix position and set a course clear of all foul ground that would take us between Britannia Blinder and the menacing shore.

Then, through the heat-haze, I saw the foundations of a white tower on a mass of granite boulders. No mistake about that headland now – a bearing, log-reading, bearing again, distance run checked and I pricked the chart with satisfaction and relief. That was Cape Columbine, where men were at work building South Africa's last great lighthouse. When the four million candle-power electric lamp was switched on at Cape Columbine in October, 1936, there was no treacherous strip of coastline between Swakopmund and St. Lucia Bay, nearly two thousand miles, lacking a friendly white beam.

These lights of South Africa flicker across many a scene of adventure. Amid the sand and reefs of Cape Columbine lie the bones of Dutch East India ships and the steel plates of

modern passenger steamers. The loom of the new light is the first landfall made by vessels bound for Cape Town from the United States and Europe. In misty weather a radio beacon and the 7-miles' blast of a fog signal warn shipmasters to keep away from the rocks that have claimed so many hulls.

It was here off Columbine that the Portuguese mail steamer *Lisboa* struck. She had bulls on deck for the ring in Lourenço Marques; and barrels of *vino tinto* below. They saved the bulls, and twenty magnificent washstands, before she broke up and stained the sea red for miles with her wine. Now many of the farmers of the coastal belt possess fine silver plate marked "Empresa Nacional de Navegacao," while I have one of the mahogany washstands carved with the same resounding title in my seaside

bungalow. A number of "pipes" of red wine still lie buried in the dunes, hidden there when the Customs men became troublesome, and never afterwards located. The lighthouse will put a stop to the loss of fine ships and the loot thrown up by the generous sea.

Run your finger down the chart of the territories ruled by the Union Government, and you will encounter many little yellow splashes denoting lighthouses – each with its own stories of sea drama and human struggle. Even the fiction written round lighthouses is no more gripping than some of the true records of the lighthouse service. Here on the South-West African coast is a desert stretch where diamonds worth millions have been found, swept by the ray of Luderitz-bucht light; there an island of pen-

guins; an abandoned leper settlement; a rocky cape on which a dozen good ships have gone to their doom; river mouths sighted by the old navigators out of Lisbon, and modern harbours where the proud mail boats slide alongside the wharves.

Swakopmund is the most northerly of all the lights. It shares with the Pelican Point light at Walvis Bay the distinction of having on an average two thousand hours of fog a year and other stranger weather. Streaks of flame and pillars of yellow smoke rising from the sea, black rain and marvellous phosphorescent displays are all recorded in the log-book. These are due to sulphur eruption. The Pelican Point light-keeper has seen a mud island, smelling unpleasantly of sulphureted hydrogen, appear above the surface of Walvis Bay, only to vanish after a few days.

Millions of dead fish are flung on the beaches at such times, and occasionally a few whales. Mile after mile of sand is covered, like a gigantic fishmonger's slab, with sharks of many types, electric fish, huge skates, sting rays, fish that are caught for food and fish so poisonous that the man who eat them dies within three minutes.

Pelican Point shelters the harbour and holds in its shifting sands the broken hulls of ships lost there before the lighthouse was built. Only half a century ago the harbour of Walvis Bay was still a "no-man's-land" peopled by roving Dutch hunters, Hottentots and men who had fled from more settled areas for reasons of their own. There the ivory traders sold their tusks and slave dealers their human cargoes. Today the lighthouse guards a growing

modern seaport with its tugs and huge refrigerating plant.

Steam south for 250 miles and you raise the Diaz Point lighthouse, built on the site of the landing of Diaz at Angra Pequena more than four centuries ago. Bright villas and impressive public buildings now stand on the edge of the desert where Diaz left his memorial pillar. They call the town Luderitzbucht, the town that lives on diamonds. If you visit the lighthouse-keepers, do not stop to examine the ground – it is diamondiferous, and the police are watchful. (The lighthouse engineer of the Union was once nearly arrested on this coast while making an innocent inspection.) Nearby lies Halifax Island, stronghold of sea birds, providing many tons of rich guano every year. A Diaz keeper with his wife, son and boat's crew were all

drowned returning from a weekend picnic on Halifax Island some years ago.

Port Nolloth, the next light, guides ships across the bar into the harbour discovered by Commander Nolloth R.N., during his survey of the Namaqualand coast eighty years ago. Away in the copper mountains inland the Cornish miners were breaking out the ore and sending it in ox-wagons to a bay farther south. Port Nolloth, it was found, offered better facilities for shipment. A skeleton pile of tram rails served as the first lighthouse, and later a slender tower was built, with an explosive signal for foggy weather. This warning, and the tolling of the fog bell, are the typical sounds of Port Nolloth. The copper boom collapsed long ago, the last of the Cornish miners departed. Here in native



The lighthouse at Port Nolloth.

rebellions and greater wars, transports landed their men and guns under the beam of the lighthouse. On this windswept shore desperate crowds have gathered to denounce the Government that seized the newly-found diamonds. The lighthouse shines over streets of tin shacks where only memories of wealth remain.

South again, past Columbine, to the lighthouse I know best of all – Dassen Island, honeycombed with penguin burrows. Dassen, 36 miles north of Cape Town, receives supplies once a month and ranks as a lonely light. One night I followed the keeper into the dark heights of the tower until we reached the lamp-room 150 feet from the ground. “The whole tower shivers in a gale,” said the keeper. It was bright, but not dazzling, in the lamp-room, for the lamp that sends out the

long flash is small. The immense lens revolving round the flame gives the brilliance. A weight, running down the centre of the lighthouse, turns the lens on its bath of mercury – simple, reliable clockwork which the keeper must wind up every two hours.

“You see that a lighthouse man’s life is not so easy as it might appear,” pointed out the keeper. “We have just finished painting the tower outside – a dizzy job. The lens weighs several tons and that means elbow grease when you have to clean it. There is always paintwork up here to be scrubbed, brass to be polished, lamps to be cleaned, weather records to be kept. We have to think of the airman, too, nowadays and note the sky conditions, clouds and wind speeds. There is a wireless station on the island – the keepers are the operators.

Nothing new in that; we had wireless telegraph sets in some of our lighthouses in 1914, and seven years later the first wireless telephone sets were installed. Before that, we sent urgent messages from Dassen by pigeon post.”

In the daytime I noticed curtains drawn round the glass of the lamp-room. Without this precaution the oil of the lamps and clockwork would be set on fire by the intense concentration of the sun’s rays inwards through the glass. Curtains are sometimes set alight, and the keepers have always to be on guard against fire. (One man in a French lighthouse was attending to the lamp when the kitchen fire below set the room ablaze. Cut off by the smoke-filled staircase, he descended outside with the aid of a rope and put the fire out.)

At all the remote lighthouses stores sufficient for three months must be kept, for heavy weather has sometimes prevented the tugs from landing fresh supplies on the usual mail days. A large stock of paraffin is necessary – one large cylinder is consumed in two nights at the Dassen light.

Lighthouse men, you find, are often the sons of lighthouse men. They have been brought up in the tradition, and see no hardship in their isolation. Working without supervision, a strong sense of duty carries them through their seven-day week. No keeper has ever been found drunk at his post. They are seldom troubled by the fact that they cannot call in the doctor save in a real emergency. Only when their children have to leave them to attend school far away is there a tinge of sadness.

Contrary to popular belief and fiction, the keepers of the lights live in harmony and do not tire of seeing the same faces every day. There is never a lack of volunteers for lonely lights such as Dassen Island. No “Grand Guignol” drama disturbs the calm routine of the South African coast lights. “At the end of a spell of leave in town I am always glad to go back,” a keeper once told me. “When I win the big sweepstake I shall build a lighthouse of my own, and live there, and turn on the light when I feel like it.”

Though Dassen Island is no languorous tropic isle of palms and warm trade winds the keepers like it. More than a century ago a Portuguese naval officer named d’Almeida found the fascination of Dassen so strong that he settled there, built a house, imported

animals for food and baboons to amuse him. He was the first man to work the guano deposits and send penguin eggs to the mainland. Today South Africa eats half a million penguin eggs a year and pays 4d. apiece for them. The keepers enjoy this luxury free, and catch for their tables the great crawfish that swarm in these ice-cold waters.

The son of the first d'Almeida was placed in charge of Dassen when the Government took charge of the phosphate wealth and the sealing. A grandson left the island to become a gold-miner on the Rand; but with an unusual sense of fitness and tradition the authorities brought him back to the island as headman when his father died. I met him there during a yachting cruise some years ago – a dark, good-humoured giant of a man clearly

revealing his Portuguese ancestry, proud of his island home and his regiments of birds. The penguins, like fat old gentlemen in dinner jackets and white shirtfronts, never cease to amuse the human beings who live among them. It is wise to tread delicately through their ranks, for a false step into a penguin burrow may mean a violent stab in the ankle. One rough track, about a mile long, runs through the penguin colonies – a path where I was astonished to find a crazy skeleton of a motor-car plying noisily between the landing-place and the lighthouse. The keepers use the car for transporting supplies. It is a sort of island heirloom, passed on down the years from keeper to keeper, and maintained in running order with the aid of “lighthouse spares.”

Robben Island, to the southwards, has

its motor-car, too, and there the lighthouse men have a pleasant circular drive of about five miles through fields of arum lilies and patches of trees. This is an isle of ghosts, with its streets of empty houses and hospitals, clubs, stores, rusting trolley lines and rotting jetty. Since the departure of the lepers, for a central hospital inland, Robben Island has been given up to the lighthouse men and their families, hordes of rabbits, and cats that have run wild and prey on the rabbits. Each year some of the former members of the leper settlement staff revisit the island, walk sadly through their ruined homes and talk over old times. Once a south-easter arose suddenly, and the whole party was marooned for several days, kept from starvation by their friends of the lighthouse.

There is hardly a lighthouse on the

coast, I suppose, which was not built as the direct result of a shipwreck. In some places emergency stores for shipwrecked seamen are kept in sealed drums. Fog-signals also follow disasters – the gun on Robben Island, followed by the present fog siren, was not provided until the mail steamer *Tantallon Castle* had gone to her doom in a fog.

Cape Town's first lighthouse was a tar barrel burnt in a tower at Green Point to guide the Dutch East India ships into Table Bay. Oil lamps came next, and now electricity is being used wherever possible. The modern Green Point lighthouse, which stands close to the first light, possesses a beam of 850,000 candle-power, which has been sighted by ships more than 23 miles away.

The task of keeping the Union's lights

burning bright and clear never ceases – there is always something to be done. Old iron towers have to be encased in concrete. New fog-signals, new lamps and occasionally new lighthouses have to be provided. In one or two places it has been possible to replace men by machinery. This was done at Roman Rock, in False Bay, some years ago. The task of building a lighthouse there was the most difficult construction job ever tackled in these waters – an Eddystone of the south indeed. The rock itself appeared above the water only “between seas” at the lowest spring tides. Nevertheless, the entrance to the naval base of Simon’s Town demanded protection. Masonry was gradually placed in position, surmounted by an iron tower. The three men stationed there found it tantalising



Roman rock lighthouse. Showing how the men of the service climb up to inspect the automatic light.

to stare at the seaside resorts all along the False Bay coast, cut off, as they were, for weeks at a time. Lonely

island lights are different; on Roman Rock they could take no exercise, and their only amusement was fishing from the high gallery and watching most of the fish drop off before they could haul them up 50 feet from the water. So no one grieved when the ingenious sun-valve apparatus was installed, opening and closing by the heat of the sun, lighting up at sunset and going out at sunrise.

Normally the acetylene-gas cylinders need filling only once a year, and failures are almost unknown. Soon after the keepers had left Roman Rock, however, the lighthouse engineer was walking along the False Bay front, one evening, when he observed, to his horror, that the light was not operating. He raced to Simon's Town by car, found a boat's crew willing to face the fresh south-easter, and pulled

off into the darkness. It was hard to find the disabled lighthouse in the night, sheets of spray were coming over, the boat was shipping water. Alongside Roman Rock at last the engineer had to battle with wind and sea to reach the iron ladder. He was drenched and exhausted when he returned to the shore, but Roman Rock was showing its white revolving light and he was satisfied.

Cape Point, I think, must rank as one of the world's famous lighthouses, a great lamp-post on that road to London that is marked, further on, by Finisterre and Ushant. The old light stood so high above the breakers that it was often covered by clouds; so a new lighthouse was built in 1914 close to Vasco da Gama's pillar, where a mass of rock juts out to sea. I was standing there with the keeper one day when a

black funnelled, grey hulled Portuguese liner steamed past and gave three siren blasts. It was a salute to a lost ship of the same company, a wreck in which a Cape Point lighthouse keeper played a gallant part. The ship bore the ill-fated name of *Lusitania*, and she was homeward bound from East Africa in 1914, with nearly eight hundred souls on board. Two miles southward of Cape Point lies the Bellows Rock, just awash, and on that death-trap the *Lusitania* crashed at midnight in misty weather.

Distress rockets were seen by the lighthouse keepers. They telephoned Simonstown, then one of them hurried down to the beach below the lighthouse, where, it was said, no boat had ever landed safely. And there, as he expected, were the heavily-loaded life-boats from the *Lusitania* about to risk

the heavy swell and the surf. Climbing out on the rocks the frantic keeper yelled and whistled his warnings and waved his lantern to keep the boats away. One boat failed to grasp the meaning of the signals and came roaring in on the crest of a wave, slewed round, capsized. The lighthouse man dragged all the half-drowned Portuguese from the water. Meanwhile the other boats headed seawards and were picked up by an Admiralty tug from Simonstown. Thanks to the lighthouse keeper only two lives were lost that night. Mr. J. E. Allen, who was then (and still is) a keeper at the Cape Point lighthouse, received a silver medal from the Portuguese Government and a cheque for £50. Every month the sound of a mail steamer's siren reminds him of the rainy night when his efforts

probably saved hundreds of lives.

At one period, long ago, the Simonstown magistrate paid regular official visits to Cape Point lighthouse. The hospitable keepers, who entertained most of the illustrious of South Africa and many celebrated travellers, disliked the idea of inspection by one outside their own department. It became known to them, however, that the magistrate had recently been operated upon for appendicitis; and whenever the magistrate called they persuaded him to show them the scar. "He comes to inspect us – why shouldn't we inspect him?" they told visitors.

Cape Point is within easy reach of Simon's Town nowadays, but it is still a wonderful place to observe wild life. Troops of baboons scamper over the rocks near the lighthouse and some-

times tap mischievously at the windows of the keepers' houses at night. Ostriches and buck roam the veld. Seals haul up on the rocks to sun themselves, and sharks cruise past the breakers. For many years a pair of eagles had their nest on a precipice, seizing the lighthouse fowls and the dassies. There are duikers' eggs to be collected on the cliffs, though one keeper, raiding the nests, slipped and fell into the sea. His body was never recovered.

From the Danger Point lighthouse you can see the great Cape rollers breaking heavily over Birkenhead Rock. There is a legend among the fishermen of these waters that an iron-bound chest containing the *Birkenhead's* money lies in fairly shallow water off this shore. I once accompanied a treasure-seeking expedition which hoped to

raise the chest. According to information received the chest had been seen at low spring tide, and the fishermen had tried to move it with long poles. These attempts having failed, a syndicate had been formed and a diver brought to the spot.

It was an unlikely spot for diving, with long reef running into the sea and the surf beating into the rough channels between. We watched the diver lurching over the slippery rocks with his air-tube and life-line into the swirling sea. He came up with his forehead and hands battered and cut. "There's nothing down there but a square fiat rock, covered with shellfish, that looks like a box," said the diver. "And I am not going down there again."

"Farthest south" is the Agulhas light, shining over the graves of scores of ships that failed to weather the

southern tip of Africa. Points and coves near the lighthouse bear the names of wrecked ships; and the sea still takes toll at this grim corner in spite of the fact that the lighthouse has been gleaming for almost a century. One of the most remarkable sights ever seen from the lighthouse was a small iceberg that had drifted all the way from the Antarctic barrier, to run aground at last on Cape Agulhas. That was in 1850, and there have been no icebergs seen from the South African coast since then.

Bird Island, near Port Elizabeth, is a penguin isle like Dassen – one of the two island lighthouses officially regarded as lonely. Fishing for man-eating sharks is the most exciting sport there. Hungry sharks swarm round the island in the hope of catching an unwary seal. A lighthouse keeper told

me that he had opened large man-eaters, twenty-foot specimens, and had found whole seals in their stomachs. The men use watertight oil drums and wire lines when fishing for sharks; a line alone would not stand the strain. Pulling the drum under water tires the shark, however, and then it may be landed.

All three keepers of the Bird Island lighthouse once put out in a dinghy to rescue the crew of a foundering fishing-boat. Their attempt was in vain, the men drowned before they could reach them. Then the wind and sea rose so that the keepers could not return to the only landing-place. All night they struggled to keep their dinghy afloat in the lee of the island. Meanwhile their wives kept the light burning. As far as they knew, their husbands might have been claimed by

the sea. The brave women, unable to operate the proper burners, carried the small paraffin lamps from their homes up the tower and pushed the lenses round by hand.

“Keep the light burning bright and clear from sunset to sunrise” – that is the first duty of lighthouse men all over the world. Occasionally it is a difficult duty. The Cape St. Francis lighthouse was struck by lightning, the lamps were shattered and the apparatus burnt out. Nevertheless, the men set to work and improvised a light which was kept going until daybreak. At another lighthouse, when the engine working the half-ton fog bell failed, the keeper tied a rope to the clapper and struck the bell at the right intervals for nine hours – hundreds of heavy strokes.

A ship rolled over and sank close to

the Bluff lighthouse at Durban not long ago. They had to blast the sunken hull out of the harbour mouth, and the explosions upset the mercury bath in the lighthouse. For several nights the keepers were forced to turn the lens mechanism by hand so that outwardly there would be no change in the flash. In a gale of wind, of course, the keeper must be ready to replace broken glass with "storm panes" to protect the sacred flame of the lamp.

One South African lighthouse, the last of the long chain, is exposed to earthquake shocks. This is the St. Lucia lighthouse, standing on a remote cape in Zululand. Until recently the only means of transport to the lighthouse was the ox-wagon; now a motor road has been built. St. Lucia light, however, still lies in wild country where pythons and the

dreaded black mambas are plentiful; where hippos still send their deep calls booming over the lagoons, and crocodiles lurk in the marshes.

One keeper, Mr. W. Murphy, was appointed to the St. Lucia light when it was built in 1905, and retired in 1933 after serving there continuously save for spells of leave. He made the lighthouse garden the prettiest along the whole coast, a replica of an old English coastguard station. Among the Zulus, he gained a tremendous reputation both as a judge in disputes and as a doctor. Once a native whose head had been split open in a beer drinking brawl was carried up to the lighthouse. Murphy filled the cavity with Friar's Balsam, and finished what he called "a seamanlike job" with bandages. Some weeks later the native, fully recovered, arrived with a scraggy fowl as thank-

offering.

Always resourceful, Murphy did great work during the floods of 1918, navigating the swamps on an improvised raft to rescue settlers cut off by the water. His most nerve-racking experience, however, came on December 31, 1932, when the lighthouse tower shook violently, gas cylinders were pitched from their casings and began leaking, and all the mechanism stopped. Crockery in the living quarters was smashed, tools thrown from benches and tables, water tanks were damaged. Long fissures appeared in the earth outside.

Murphy had all day to repair the havoc, but was hampered by further shocks. Often he thought the iron tower would not stand the strain; but it was built on solid rock, and when the last of the tremors passed St. Lucia

light was burning bravely. "Och, it was just a new experience," Murphy declared afterwards. He had faced so many dangers, carried out his work while staggering with so many attacks of malaria, that the earthquake had not upset him at all.

It is fitting that this glance at the lights of South Africa should close with the story of this old sailor man's devotion to duty. For that is the spirit of the lighthouse service, the tradition of long and faithful service maintained by picked men. "Keep the light burning bright and clear from sunset to sunrise." It sounds easy, almost a lazy job, with the essence of solitude as the only drawback. In reality it is hard work, for there is no such word as "breakdown" in their vocabulary. The men of the lighthouses are true heroes of the solitude they bear so well.

CHAPTER 7

DIAMONDS AND DOGS

MEN who saw diamonds turned up with spades in the early days of Kimberley are now watching yet another new system of diamond production. The most ingenious modern machinery is at work in an industry that has lost none of its fascination. I have just seen the faster and cheaper recovery process at the De Beers mines in Kimberley. The system is getting into its stride after heart-breaking years of closed mines and stagnation. Now the town that has known so many vicissitudes is reviving. Kimberley has gained fresh hope of future stability for a trade more sensitive than any other luxury trade in the world. The clamour of the crushers in action again is a brave challenge to the menace of depression.

Years ago, and right up to 1924, the diamondiferous “blue ground” brought up from the Kimberley mines was spread out on “floors” for a year, so that the weather might break up the rock. Then crushing and washing plants were installed. The improvements which have just been made, however, go much farther in the direction of speed and economy. Diamonds are being won today with all the efficiency of a Rand gold-mine.

The old machinery crushed a vast amount of rock that was plainly not diamondiferous. In every shift of eight hours hundreds of tons of unproductive rock found its way through the mills and the rotary washing pans. Valuable “blue ground,” however, is easy to identify – the surface is rough, and it contains glittering particles of mica. So when the ground comes up,

1350 feet in a skip, it is tipped and fed slowly on to long conveyor belts. A magnetic separator snatches away broken drills and other scrap metals. The vibratory screen helps to sort the rough from the smooth and useless rock. Finally there are the lines of intelligent natives who pick by hand as the belts pass them, saving the old waste of effort.

Hand picking is one of the most popular jobs on the mines. There is a reward for every diamond found by an employee of De Beers; and although diamonds are not usually revealed until the final concentration the chance is always present. The reward is made according to the size of the diamond, at the rate of 5s. a carat. A native convict labourer once handed in a stone of 268 carats. About half a dozen finds are made on the conveyor

belts every month, so that there is no boredom in that department and honesty receives encouragement. The old curse of "I.D.B." practically disappeared in Kimberley years ago.

Convicts, by the way, are no longer employed by De Beers. During a previous visit I was amused to find criminals in red-striped jerseys at work even in the pulsator house, where the diamonds come to light at last. Officials told me that these prisoners valued their tobacco rations far more highly than the diamonds under their noses. The temptation to smuggle diamonds out was slight, for there was no hope of success!

The brittle diamond would, in spite of its hardness, be in danger of destruction if the crushing machines were not designed to prevent that disaster. Occasionally a diamond splits along a

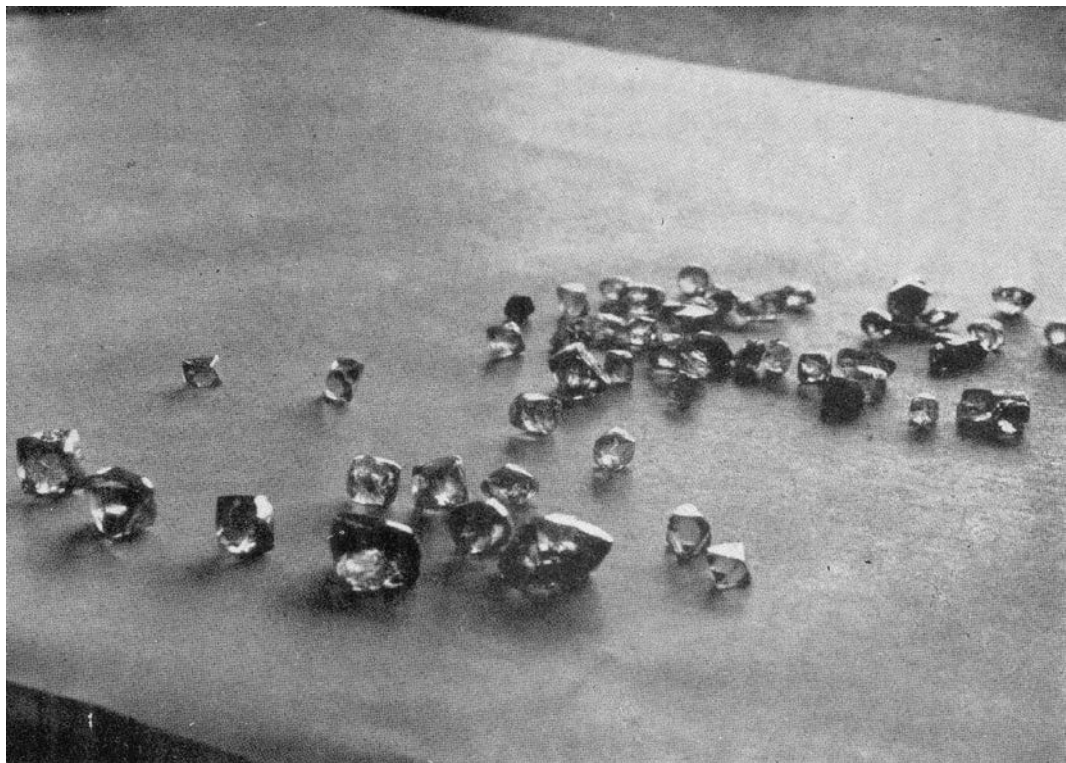
flaw, anticipating the task of the cutter; but there are no serious losses. Rollers have springs. The stamping so familiar on gold-mines is never heard here. Even the largest diamond passes safely to the washing plant.

Washing is a stage that has gathered much greater speed under the new system. Formerly each of the three mines – Dutoitspan, Bultfontein and Wesselton – washed its own ground. Now there is a central plant for the three, capable of washing as much as 1200 loads a day and sending out as concentrates only one hundredth of the ground tipped into the pans. At the present time 125,000 tons are washed a month, equivalent to the output of a busy Rand gold-mine; all this despite the fact that the “blue ground” is hoist in eight hours a day instead of twenty-four.

The pulsator, most spectacular of the processes, remains unchanged. It is simply a table covered with grease and shaken steadily as the gravel washes over it with a stream of water. Diamonds are caught in the grease while the worthless gravel passes on. No one has ever really understood why the device makes this intelligent selection – not even the employee who invented it – but the fact that it works is enough. When the tables are scraped, and the thick mess boiled, the 14,000,000-to-one concentration is complete. That is the ratio. It takes, on an average, 70,000 tons of “blue ground” to produce diamonds weighing about 10 lbs.

2

Sorting is now carried out in the Central Sorting Office in Kimberley. All the large diamond producers of



Rough diamonds on the sorting table at Kimberley.

South Africa and South-West Africa send their “parcels” to this well-protected stone building. Not so long ago each company maintained its own staff of sorters and valuers. The Central Sorting Office has rationalised this important section of the industry, besides giving the sorters a wider experience of different types of diamonds.

In this room are youths learning one of the world’s strangest occupations, and middle-aged experts who can tell the origin of a diamond at a glance – and what it is worth. They sit over the shining fortunes in a long row, twenty-three men gripped by the spell of the diamond, the glamour that never grows stale. White paper covers the work-table. Beside each sorter are the simple tools of the diamond trade.

“Here are the sieves – the only

mechanical things in the office,” pointed out my guide. “The diamonds come from a mine in a jumble, and the sieve helps to size them roughly. But after a few shakes the whole process must be done by balance, hand and eye.”

We passed into an air-tight weighing room to examine the scales. No draught must be allowed to interfere with an operation in which a weight of one-quarter of a carat may mean a difference of £25, more or less, in the value of the diamond. There are 142½ carats to the ounce, and the largest scale will weigh a stone of 12,000 carats – if ever such a stone is found.

Diamonds are cleaned with hydro-fluoric acid. They need no other treatment until they reach the hands of the cutter. But what a shuffling and a series of classifications they must

undergo before they are ready for shipment to London! I looked over the shoulders of the sorters. Each man had a pair of tweezers and a scoop; and sometimes a man would reach for the headgear of magnifying glasses to decide a difficult problem.

“It is all done by eye, instinct and experience – a human affair from start to finish,” went on my guide. “No machinery will ever replace these men. No textbook on the subject will ever be written. The job can be learnt only on the spot, by watching others, and I suppose this room is the finest training ground in the world. No other office handles such quantities and varieties of diamonds.”

He pointed to the youngest sorter. “We have to catch them young – every man in this room started learning the art at fifteen or sixteen. A man of twenty-

five is much too old to begin. It is a matter of temperament. You must handle diamonds constantly for fifteen years before you can call yourself an expert. Only then will you be able to distinguish diamonds from different mines and areas at sight.

“Monotonous work? Never. We find diamonds very interesting at all times. No two diamonds are exactly alike, and there is always something new cropping up to maintain the endless fascination of sorting. Opening a fresh day’s output is like opening a newspaper. You never know what may be inside, and often the contents are startling.

“Of course, the eyes feel the strain, and so a working day of six and a half hours is arranged. Weighing and invoicing vary the routine and ease the strain. In dull weather nothing can be

done – a dust storm or thunderstorm stops all sorting immediately. In London, in the winter, sorting is a slow process. Here we seldom fall behind our schedule. Our windows, you observe, face south so that no sunshine may fall on the diamonds and dazzle the sorters. If the man opposite painted his roof white we should have to ask him to paint it again, a darker colour. Daylight is essential; a great deal of money has been spent on experiments with artificial light, but no substitute for daylight has been found satisfactory.”

As I walked down the line of sorters I learnt that diamonds are now graded in much greater detail than ever before. A mine’s monthly output may be sorted into a thousand or two thousand different lots – a task ten times more complicated than the old system of

sorting.

In one heap lay the pick of the output – magnificent blue-white diamonds of the finest shape and purity. Then there were heaps of colours and shades, almost imperceptible variations that affect prices enormously. I was shown a large stone with black flaws so pronounced as to render it almost valueless as jewellery. Diamonds are found in all the colours of the rainbow, but red is the rarest. Impurities in the crystal may give a diamond a red tinge and increase the price many times – an example of a fault being worth more than perfection. Thus a river stone of six carats found near Kimberley fetched £900. Green diamonds that cut green are valuable, too. The whole art of sorting and valuing diamonds lies in the power to visualise the appearance of the stone after cutting. Acknow-

ledged experts are liable to errors of judgment in this matter.

After sizes, shapes and colours come the “cleavages,” diamonds that have been broken in the earth; and “maacles,” or twin stones. Among the stones that would look hideous when set in a brooch or ring are many that can be sold at high prices for industrial purposes. Precision machinery demands diamonds. New uses for the industrial diamond are being discovered every year. Soviet Russia purchases large “parcels.” A stone that defies cutting will command a large price in the market where men buy diamonds for drilling and the manufacture of engines.

I pointed to a heap of hundreds of diamonds and tested the skill of the chief valuator. “Show me the finest diamond there, please.” Instantly his

hand went forward and he selected a brown octahedron. “There may be differences of opinion in valuation, but every man here will agree that this stone is the best,” he declared.

And then he gave a further display of that mysterious sixth sense possessed by diamond experts. He glanced over a table of open tin boxes, each containing diamonds, and told me (without looking at the labels) the origin of each assortment.

“There are diamonds from Alexander Bay, the famous ‘Aladdin’s Cave’ at the mouth of the Orange River, the Government treasure house that has yielded millions. Blue-white, brown, yellow – all with a typical brilliance; though they are not, as some have said, like cut diamonds. The absence of very low qualities may be noted.

“The next box is from South-West Africa. I cannot tell you why they differ from some of the other assortments, but I know in my own mind. Mines and diggings only a few miles apart produce stones that are totally different. Freaks do occur, and that is why a diamond expert in a court of law has an even harder task than a handwriting expert. But if I cannot always convince a judge and jury, I know in my own mind just as a farmer knows his own sheep. Instinct cannot be explained, and we must leave it at that.”

These men do not need acids to test the stones that pass before them, year after year, in gorgeous array. The eye is the sole test, and no strange mineral will ever deceive them.

When the sorting is over the diamonds are folded into “diamond papers,” a

description of qualities and weights is written, and the little black boxes are packed and sealed. They travel, not by special messenger as you might suppose, but by registered post. Diamonds worth millions have left Kimberley that way, and no thief has yet succeeded in robbing the London bag of its riches.

3

Barbed-wire entanglements at Kimberley enclose a square mile of crumbled “blue ground” which still contains a fortune in diamonds. This private El Dorado is guarded by trained dogs.

Fifty men patrolled this area at the time when the whole output of the De Beers mines was left exposed to the weather before the diamonds could be extracted. Four men and a dozen dogs carry out the task at the present time,



A guard dog tackles a “diamond raider”. A scene at the training station at Kimberley.

defeating all raiders.

Not that raids are frequent – the mere presence of the dogs is a strong deterrent. Coloured criminals who might be tempted to scratch the rich earth at night see the dog-training station every time they pass out of Kimberley along the main road. It is there as a warning.

When I visited the kennels recently I found Mr. Arthur Marsberg in charge – Marsberg, the international footballer who went to England thirty years ago with the first Springbok team. Now Mr. Marsberg trains dogs with the same kindly skill that he once showed in training young footballers. Dogs were his hobby when, in 1928, De Beers decided to protect their property with dogs. And so Mr. Marsberg built up the efficient system, that I saw within the barbed wire.

At first Alsations were used. Today there are more than sixty Alsations and fourteen bull-mastiffs – a “staff” from which the fifty dogs that keep watch every night are drawn.

“All the most important places on the mines have their dog sentries at night – the pulsator house, where the diamonds are finally recovered, and the offices in Kimberley where diamonds are kept in safes,” Mr. Marsberg told me. “At each spot there is a dog chained to a picket line about a hundred yards in length. If this dog hears a suspicious sound, it barks and up comes a “fighting dog,” that has been roaming the area free, to investigate.

“Cattle are responsible for many false alarms. But at long intervals the dogs find a man wearing knee and elbow pads, crawling over the ground in



Young alsatians at training station where dogs are taught to guard the Kimberley diamond fields.

search of diamonds. Then the “fighting dog” puts its training into practice and tackles the raider without biting. If the man attempts to escape the dog will hang on to his arm, but it will never fly at his throat. Otherwise the dog will escort the man and shepherd him towards the human guard.

“A raider armed with a revolver is forced by the dogs to drop his weapon. The dog then carries the revolver in its mouth until the guard takes charge of the trespasser. So cleverly do the dogs carry out their duties that I have never known a dog to be injured in a tussle.”

Mr. Marsberg was once bitten in the nose while stopping a dog fight; but he declares he has never known a treacherous Alsatian. Training starts in the “kindergarten,” where the puppies are strung out on a picket line and taught

to sit and lie down at the word of command, and later to heel.

After a month or two comes a course of discipline, when the dogs go over the jumps and hoops. Finally there are exercises in which a coloured man wearing a padded leather suit with long sleeves takes the part of a raider, and the dogs are taught to hang on to the man tenaciously until the trainer arrives on the scene.

I saw a dramatic rehearsal with a famous dog named Bongo in the leading part. Bongo is ten years old, one of the first batch of Alsatis trained, and still doing useful work. The coloured man went into hiding in the long grass, and Bongo was sent sniffing out in search of him. Discovered within a minute, the man lashed out furiously. At once Bongo hackled up and gripped the long

leather sleeve. It was clear that a raider, seized by those teeth, would soon give up the struggle.

In the next test Mr. Marsberg stuck a match in the ground and despatched Bongo to reveal the strange scent. The match was speedily delivered to the trainer.

These dogs can jump over burning fences, climb walls 12 feet high, walk the plank and obey whistles and signals. The full training period is eighteen months to two years, though some are ready for duty after thirteen months.

Food is prepared in a special kitchen – meat four times a week, milk, vegetable soup and mealie meal. There is a hospital and isolation ward. “I do not believe in sergeant-major methods in training dogs, and I never give them

food I would not eat myself,” says Mr. Marsberg.

Such is the routine that saves the mines many salaries and makes the diamond “floors” in the open almost as secure as a bank safe. Thieves shudder when the motor-van drives through Kimberley every night taking the eager dogs to their posts.

4

Years ago a lucky Captain Webster discovered a hill studded with diamonds. Webster’s Kopje, they call it, beside the Vaal River, 24 miles from Kimberley.

Hordes of diggers have ransacked the hill and left the earth all pock-marked and dishevelled. In the river below the hill, however, lies Webster’s Pool, a deep hole that men gazed into moodily, a treasure chest guarded by



Diamond diggers at work on the Vaal River.

water. Other shallower pools of the Vaal had been surrounded by “horse-shoe” breakwaters, pumped dry and made to yield their diamonds. But not until recently was there a man bold enough to gamble against floods and weather in the attempt to drain Webster’s Pool to a depth of nearly 50 feet.

When I visited Webster’s Pool it was almost dry. The greatest breakwater ever flung across the Vaal was an accomplished fact, and down on the river-bed 25 white men and 700 natives were toiling feverishly to scoop out the diamond-bearing gravel while the wall held.

Mr. B. Goldberg, the Kimberley diamond buyer who financed the scheme, had taken me to the spot. The year before he tried to raise the riches of Christmas Pool farther down the

river. Landslides and floods swept away the work (and the £10,000 Mr. Goldberg had spent) before a single diamond could be recovered. Now Mr. Goldberg has risked £20,000 on the Webster’s Pool venture. He believes his engineering plan is so sound that he will be able to return to work next year after the rains, repair the damage cheaply, and win back far more than the amount in jeopardy.

Already the swish and grind of twenty washing machines make a cheerful song of diamonds in the sieves – diamonds like the large yellow stone worth £300 that a man brought out of his purse to show me. “If only it was white...” said the digger. Every man at Webster’s Pool is a partner.

Webster’s Pool was not emptied without an effort. It meant building a breakwater 500 feet long, and blasting

a side channel through nearly a mile of rock to divert the whole Vaal River.

Major Fox described that part of the work to me. I found him by his sorting-table – a sun-tanned, ex-regular army officer who prefers the river diggings to any other life in the world. He was in charge of the blasting.

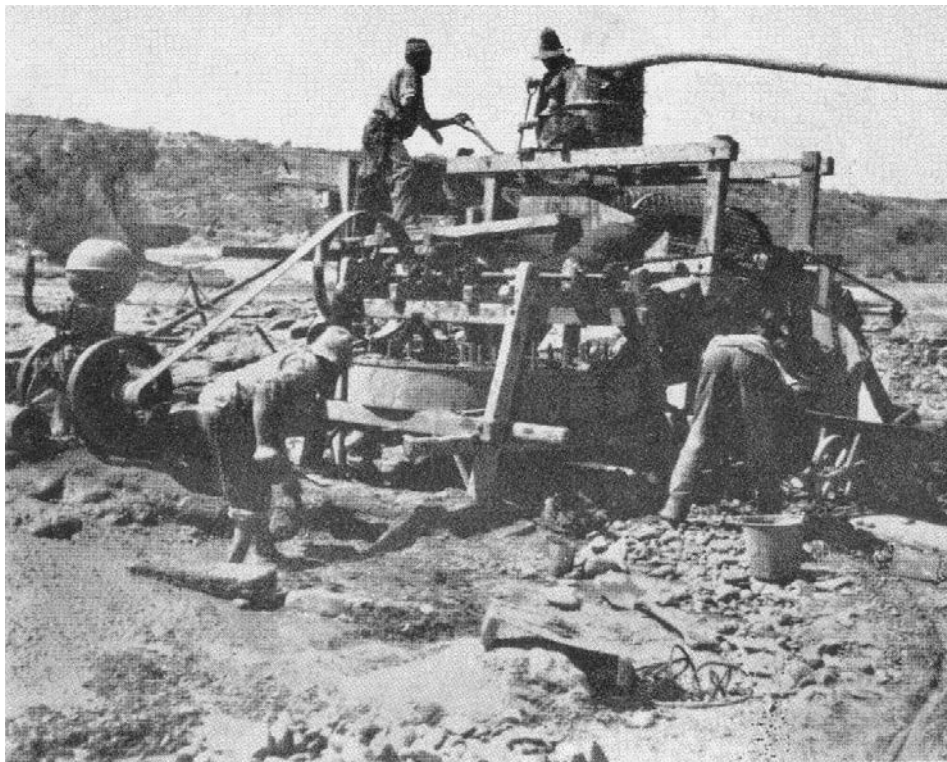
“It took 16,000 shots to blast that channel,” said Major Fox. “Not a mishap all the time – I just gave the signal and 240 shots went off together with hand lighting. All amateurs on the job, too.

“Here we live dangerously, and like it. There is tremendous pressure on that wall. If it caved in all the machinery would go and the men would be lucky to climb out before the water poured down on them. It lends a spice to the

game.”

Major Fox became a diamond digger after the South African War. In August, 1914, he was working on a claim at Webster’s Pool, having made a little breakwater of his own. He had just sold diamonds to the value of £1,000 when news of war killed the diamond market and sent Major Fox back to his regiment. Now he is back on his old claim, waiting for his son to join him. I watched him sorting his gravel, deeply absorbed in the task that has held him for so many years. “See these water-worn stones with hoops like a beer-barrel round them – ‘bantams,’ we call them,” pointed out the Major at last. “Well, when you get ‘bantams’ that size you expect something good. That is a clear indication of diamonds.”

Nearly a mile of diamondiferous river



A diamond-washing machine on the Vaal river.

bed has been exposed as a result of the Webster's Pool venture; or, as they measure on the Vaal, a thousand claims. Modern pumping machinery made the scheme possible. In the old days men built crescents from the river bank and pumped out the enclosed water with varying luck. At Delpont's Hope diamonds worth hundreds of thousands of pounds were recovered. Close to Webster's Pool a well-known digger named Fred Wilson found a "blue" of 110 carats and sold it for £1,250. It would be worth £15,000 today, for control of the market has multiplied the values of the beautiful river diamonds

But diamonds are not to be picked up without labour even in the untouched depths of Webster's Pool. There are boulders to be drilled, dynamited and torn out of the mud by cranes. The

natives work knee-deep, waist deep, shovelling away the over-burden, tracing the seam of rich gravel down to five or fifteen feet, loading the heavy iron buckets that go swinging up to the washing machines.

When the gravel comes from the washer in sieves to the sorting table – a rough structure with a corrugated iron roof and a cloth-covered board – the hopeful digger experiences a moment that never fails to thrill. He takes his scraper, spreads the circle of gravel with a flick of the wrist born of long practice, and sweeps the mass of garnets, moonstones, cats-eyes, carbon, agates, olivine and crystalloids away with contempt. Diamonds of half a carat may go with the rubbish, but no valuable stone escapes the digger's roving eye.

In that moment of suspense you see

with startling clearness the whole charm of a life that does not even provide three meals a day for most of those devoted to it. You want to take a partner who knows the game, buy the outfit, and sort your own wash. Impossible to imagine failure. You may be poor one second, but that flick of the wrist may turn up a glittering stone large enough to make you rich. It has happened again and again. Only when you see the thousands who have missed fortune on the diggings does common sense prevail.

For the river diggings are almost finished. The work at Webster's Pool, and similar schemes at other places, have given a respite to the dying industry. Shallow ground has been worked out. Laws have been passed to prevent the digger obtaining "backing" from his old friend, the diamond

buyer. Prospecting is so restricted that the digger seeking ground does not know where to turn. It is a lamentable end to a romantic industry.

There is much to be said for the river digger – that self-reliant, vigorous optimist who asks only for "ground" and a life in the open air. Men who have been frozen out of cities have made good on the generous, hospitable diggings. In good times no hungry wanderer is refused food and shelter. To hear an old diamond buyer talk of the Kimberley diggings half a century ago is to glimpse a lost paradise.

Such men still live in Kimberley, still make their weekly rounds of Gong Gong and Barkly West, Waldeks and Wintersrush. I met the oldest of them all – Mr. Maurice M. Aronson, who has held a diamond buyer's licence continuously since the eighties of last

century. Once the street outside his Kimberley office was crowded with horses and carts and men dealing in shares and diamonds. Now the street is almost deserted, scores of diamond buyers have given up the game and departed, while those who remain carry hundreds instead of thousands of pounds in their bags.

“I once paid out £9,000 in a day for river diamonds,” recalled Mr. Aronson. “And that was at a time when diamonds were comparatively cheap. My best deal was when I bought a stone and sold it the same day at a profit of £3,000 – a stone that another buyer had turned down.

“There was a much stronger element of chance then, for we were out of touch with the overseas market for weeks at a stretch. The cable and telegraph came later. If profits

sometimes were large, there were times when you had to hold on to your stock for months to get the money back.

“Most of the diggers, then and now, have an excellent knowledge of the value of diamonds. But often a stone is speculative – a large white spotted stone, for example. I remember a stone found in the Hopetown district. The colour was so wonderful that one buyer doubted whether it could be a diamond. I knew, paid £1,550 for it, and sold for £3,000.

“Then there was a woman working on the richest little patch of ground in the world at that time. She offered me a diamond for £75. It was obviously worth more, and when I gave her £100 she was so grateful that she wanted me to take her daughter as part of the bargain!”

Mr. Aronson produced a little pocket-book full of large figures. "I will show you what the business is today," said he. "Here is a sum of £6,800 – bad debts written off because the diggers are dead or gone. Yet they are honourable men, always ready to pay when they have the money."

Diamond buyers were among the first people in South Africa to use motor-cars. Mr. Aronson had a De Dion in 1902. Before that he took nearly a week to drive round the diggings with a cart and four horses, a revolver within easy reach, and a bag containing £20,000 in cash and diamonds.

I hope Webster's Pool will bring back something more than memories of the old days, something like the luck of Captain Webster whose stony kopje was the hiding place of a cool half

million.

CHAPTER 8

IN AFRICAN WATERS

*“What fearful sights the Diver must
see,
Walking alone in the depths of the
sea.”*

SOUTH AFRICAN divers seldom go down to death on the sea-floor. In spite of all the lone, weird adventures they undertake, fatalities are rare, and diver after diver passes out of the romantic trade owing to old age.

I remember discussing the mysterious death of Diver Olaf Pettersen with a group of diving experts at Table Bay Docks. Pettersen was working on the sunken wreck of the steamer *Hypatia* a few years ago, sending up ingots of copper. After a time he failed to reply to signals. They hauled him to the surface with the face-glass of his

helmet missing. He could not have unscrewed it himself.

Well-known firms making submarine equipment claim that no fatal accident has ever been traced directly to their appliances. Wind and weather, the terrible pressure at depth, sudden falls and tangled air-lines – these are the risks a diver takes. But there is no record of tragedy due to a face-glass becoming unscrewed while the diver was at work.

Even a broken face-glass is an uncommon accident, though Diver H. L. Teifel had a narrow shave at East London when his crowbar slipped and shattered the unprotected glass in front of his helmet. His diving dress filled immediately, but the ready response to his emergency danger signal saved his life. In deeper water, of course, he would have been drowned.

“There’s a difference between a deep-sea diver and an ordinary man,” Mr. R. Jones, a well-known South African diver, once told me. “Many men only go down in dockyards. Salvage work is much harder – everything is pitch-black, and the diver has only his instinct and sense of touch to guide him. An off shore job in 120 feet of water – that’s the test of a diver.”

Mr. Richard Fowley, oldest diver on the South African coast, made another significant remark. “A man will take chances on a salvage job that he would never dream of taking on ordinary construction work in shallow water.”

Pettersen himself once told me that while working on the *Hypatia*’s copper, soon after the vessel sank, a large black shape emerged from the wreckage and nearly knocked him off his feet. “It was a seal,” he said.

“Every time it circled round it gave me a flick with its tail. I had my knife handy, but I dared not strike out – wounded seal is dangerous. I stood still, and after about ten minutes of this unpleasant game the seal swam off.”

It seems hardly possible that a seal caused Pettersen’s death; but the theory is interesting in view of this previous encounter.

Sharks may cause divers anxious moments, but they are easily scared – a shower of bubbles from the air escape valve of the helmet usually does the trick. The late Alexander Lambert, a famous diver in his day, was at work off Diego Garcia, in the Indian Ocean, and was visited every day by an enormous shark. The shark came closer on each occasion, and at the end of a week Lambert decided to

put an end to the nuisance. He signalled for a large knife, held out his bare hand towards the shark as bait, and stabbed repeatedly when the monster came within reach. He then secured the dead shark with a rope, signalled for it to be hauled up, and went on with his work.

The most dangerous creature a diver can meet is the octopus. Once a man has been gripped by those tentacles it is almost impossible for him to free himself. Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon declares that a diver attacked in this way should reach forward inside the mouth of the octopus, seize the internal organs and turn the octopus inside out. This is effective when it can be carried out – the suckers immediately release their grip.

I doubt very much, however, whether Diver Palmer, hero of the great Table

Bay octopus adventure, could have saved himself in this way. He was at work on the breakwater when the octopus twined itself round him, and his comrades hauled diver and octopus to the surface by main force. Palmer was more dead than alive. One tentacle of the octopus measured 11 feet 6 inches – it was a record, larger even than the monster with “a body the size of an ox” washed up at Port Nolloth some time ago.

A satisfactory method of dealing with this peril was adopted by a diver attempting to find treasure in a sunken East Indiaman, the Middelburg, in Saldanha Bay some years ago. Two small octopuses seized his legs; but the diver was a strong man, and, after a tug-of-war, he broke away from them and rose. When next he descended he took a “mine”

containing dynamite with him. This he presented to his enemies, leaving it in their grasp. Having safely returned to the diving boat he fired the charge and saw the scattered fragments of the octopuses before returning to work.

Diver W. K. Faulds, placing concrete blocks in position for the Durban breakwater some years ago, was saved from an octopus by the diver assisting him. Faulds suddenly found that he was unable to move his legs. He knelt quietly for a time, thinking his mate was playing a joke on him. Soon, however, he felt himself being drawn slowly beneath a concrete block. At this critical moment the other diver appeared. They placed their helmets together, shouted, and thus Faulds made the danger known. The other diver found the octopus and hacked away with his knife until Faulds was

free. A sting ray – “the size of a room,” so they said – fouled Diver Farrell’s life-line in the Buffalo River at East London. Three of these huge fish had entered the river, and they were regarded as a danger to small craft. Farrell managed to shake his line clear, but not before he had been severely bruised.

There are shipwrecks inland in tropical Africa, and unaccustomed perils for divers to face. Diver Owen Palmer was sent to the Congo to assist in the salvage of a steamer which had foundered in the river. Crocodiles were seen every day, but they never tackled the divers. After months of patient work on the muddy bottom the Congo came down in flood. Many floating islands of earth, grass and bush came with the torrent. Palmer was drilling holes in the sunken

steamer's hull one day when he found he had lost touch with the surface – a floating island had drifted over the wreck and isolated him. He regained the surface after feverish work with his knife, literally cutting his way through the grass to safety.

Palmer was engaged in harbour work at Lobito Bay when he experienced his narrowest escape. Probably the greatest hazard in diving is the chance that some heavy object may become dislodged, above or below the surface, and crush the diver. On this occasion it was a 10-ton crane which fell from the jetty and hit the bottom within a few feet of where Falmer was working.

Divers are trapped far more frequently by masses of stone or metal than by the living monsters of the ocean bed. When Diver J. F. Thomson was trying to reach the copper ingots in the hold

of the sunken steamer *Cariboo* near East London he became wedged between two heavy iron plates. There he lay on his stomach, sixteen fathoms down, for five hours, while Diver Faulds worked desperately to release him. With the aid of winches, grab-hooks and wire cables he succeeded in his plan. Heavy air pressure was then called for to inflate Thomson's suit, the idea being that the additional buoyancy would carry the helpless man clear of all obstructions. Unfortunately the pressure was too great, Thomson shot up with terrific force, leapt above the surface and fell back with arms outstretched. He was severely injured, but prompt medical attention saved his life.

Diver Teifel was trapped in the same way in a mass of sunken wreckage at the Dar-es-Salaam harbour entrance.

He had crawled into a rectangular man-hole and jammed himself half-way. Whistling to keep up his courage he twisted and wriggled – utterly alone in complete darkness – until he was able to pull himself clear.

Yet in spite of all these ghastly ordeals the accidental death-rate among divers is small indeed. Years pass by without a tragedy in busy seaports where divers are at work almost every day.

2

Sharks are not cowards. If you swim in the waters of Africa believing the tale that man-eating sharks do not attack, then you are in danger of a ghastly death.

I have never forgotten the rows of scars shown to me by a young South African named Servy le Roux, who was attacked by a shark in False Bay,

near Cape Town. Looking at those deep gashes, only in the process of healing, I imagined the jaws of the shark gripping the human flesh and realised the horror of such an encounter.

Le Roux was one of several men I have met who survived that experience. His narrative made the deepest impression on me, for it was a supreme example of courage in a situation where many brave men would have perished. This encounter also settled in my own mind the controversy about man-eaters; and since then I have found ample confirmation of my views.

Le Roux's adventure occurred on January 16, 1930, at Melkbaai, near the popular seaside resort of The Strand. Here is the story as he told it to me soon afterwards:

“I was in deep water about two hundred yards from the shore and swimming parallel with it. I am strong, and a fairly good swimmer, but not a champion. Suddenly I felt a great pain in my right side below the ribs, accompanied by a shock which lifted me almost clear of the surface of the sea for a moment. In that fraction of a second I knew that a shark had seized me. “The shark held fast and dived; and in spite of the pain my senses were so acute that I could feel the rush of water as the huge, rough body went down, dragging me with it. Instinct told me to break apart the jaws that were causing me such agony. From the scars on my hands and body it appears that I thrust my right hand into the lower jaw while I gripped the upper jaw with my left hand. My fingers were cut to the bone, but I still had my

strength and I exerted it to the full.

“After a few seconds, which I should not care to live through again, the grip relaxed. I was free, back in the fresh air and striking out for the shore, leaving a trail of blood. But I had not finished with the shark. It returned immediately to the attack, and this time I felt a stab of pain in my right arm, below the elbow.

“I lashed out with my left fist, hitting the shark near the eye. My right arm came free. I swam desperately, still determined to live, but with a weakening sensation in my muscles. Then I discovered that during my battle with the shark I had turned, and now I was swimming out to sea. I swung round for the beach, the shark moving cautiously alongside and obviously seeking another opening.

“I had plenty of time to study the shark as I swam – a large dark-coloured specimen with expressionless eyes fixed on me. It was so close, indeed, that my foot struck its side several times. This was unintentional; I did not wish to provoke another attack.

“Now it seemed that the shark had changed its tactics and was trying to cut me off from the surf – the white surf which meant safety. I was almost unconscious by this time, and when the breakers picked me up and helped me shoreward I had lost sight of the shark.

“There was no one to help me out of the water, but I saw a motor-car about a hundred yards away and staggered towards it. I remember wondering whether the shark had taken my right arm; I looked to see, and found that it

was still there, but in a dreadful state. My next clear memory was that of the hospital.”

Le Roux’s experience does not prove that sharks always attack. I think the reputation for cowardice is due to the fact that on many occasions, and for reasons unknown, sharks do not molest human beings. On board a troopship in Sierra Leone harbour, where I once spent ten days, I watched large man-eaters circling the ship and took part in the capture of one of them. Yet there were negro boys diving all day long for pennies from their canoes alongside, and not once did the sharks pay them the slightest attention. This was not due to cowardice, I am sure, but because there is some truth in the assertion that sharks prefer white flesh to black. It is difficult to arrive at the truth, for many a black man has

perished in the jaws of a shark. Hunger is probably the deciding factor.

I was given striking proof both of the voracity and the courage of the shark while visiting a whaling station at Saldanha Bay, about seventy miles north of Cape Town, some years ago. A large shark caught there was opened, and the Norwegians showed me the masses of whale blubber in the stomach. To attack such a large and powerful object as a whale, and tear out strips of flesh, is not the act of a coward. Old whaler men assured me they had seen these tussles many times at sea. The sharks also followed the dead whales when they were towed back to the shore station, and it was impossible to frighten them away. A trace of blood in the water seemed to change the laziest shark into a tiger of

the sea.

All the South African records I have consulted, from the early days of the Dutch occupation of the Cape down to the present time, make it abundantly clear that the sharks in African seas are not of a species to be despised. Again and again one finds references to accidents to fishing boats and crews devoured by sharks. A man-eater caught at Walvis Bay in 1855 measured 30 feet in length and yielded 200 gallons of oil – a shark “with jaws large enough to swallow a man.”

While it is true that sharks seldom enter the surf, there have been exceptions. Horses and dogs have fallen victims to sharks in shallow water.

Table Bay has been regularly visited in recent years by some of the largest

man-eaters ever seen in African waters. There are some who deny that sharks with a length of 30 feet exist. At all events, a shark measuring 28 feet 6 inches and weighing 4 tons was captured in January, 1935, by Hout Bay fishermen. The shark was trapped in a net of 2-inch mesh after a strenuous fight. Fourteen bullets killed it. A blow from the tail of such a shark is sufficient to crack the side of a boat.

Another encounter proving the aggressive nature of the notorious "blue" shark occurred in Simon's Bay on July 30, 1901, during the South African War, when thousands of Boer prisoners of war were kept in camp outside Simon's Town. A number of Boers were swimming off the well-known Seaforth beach when a large shark suddenly dashed in among them and gripped a man, Jan Chandler of

Ladybrand, by the leg just as he was hauling himself on to a rock. The leg was taken off completely above the knee, and though the man was rushed to the military hospital he died the same day. Simon's Bay has an evil reputation for sharks, and men of the Royal Navy are allowed to bathe only in the shark-proof enclosures.

A close study of the records suggests that few people who find themselves actually in the jaws of a shark survive the experience. Often enough they have been rescued, seriously injured. But the shock is tremendous. Miss Madeleine Dalton, a young woman farming in the Bredasdorp district, lived to tell the tale. She intended fishing off the rocks, and waded into the water looking for bait. While she was standing there, only knee-deep, a shark rushed in and attempted to seize

her leg. Several teeth sank into the flesh, but the shark was hampered by the shallow water, and Miss Dalton was able to drag herself free before the shark could close its jaws.

One of the strangest shark tragedies ever known in South Africa was that which occurred when a new concrete wharf was being constructed some years ago. Divers were at work on a foundation which gradually rose to low-water mark. Between the foundation and the shore a large shallow pool was formed; and on the day after the concrete wall was completed a young Indian boy went swimming there. Screams were heard and the boy was brought to the shore with one leg missing. He died a few minutes afterwards. Then it was found that a shark had been trapped and walled in by the foundation.

There is no doubt about the shark danger in South African waters – controversy flickers out in the face of indisputable evidence. Sharks are “spotted” from aeroplanes and hunted with hooks, steel nets and harpoon guns when they appear off popular bathing resorts. In January, 1935, a reward of £50 was offered for the capture of a huge man-eater which had menaced bathers in Table Bay.

The wise man remembers that sharks may attack at any moment.

3

Since the days when the first navigators set out to explore the oceans there have been tales of weird monsters. Tales that are not all imagination either. Strange creatures are seen in South African waters every year, and along the 2000 miles of

coast-line that is now Union Territory.

Even the believer in sea serpents need not be discouraged. The most famous of all descriptions was given by Captain M'Quhae R.N., of H.M.S. *Daedalus*, bound from the Cape to St. Helena in 1848. Captain M'Quhae reported the sea serpent when he arrived in Plymouth, and as the story got into the London Times he was requested by the Admiralty to give a full account. That was the beginning of much trouble for Captain M'Quhae. With the captain at the time the serpent was sighted were the officer of the watch and the master.

“On our attention being called to the object,” reported Captain M'Quhae, “it was discovered to be an enormous serpent, with head and shoulders kept four feet constantly above the surface of the sea, and as nearly as we could

approximate by comparing it with the length of what our main-topsail yard would show in the water, there was at very least sixty feet of the animal a *fleur d'eau*, no portion of which was, to our perception, used in propelling it through the water, either by vertical or horizontal undulation.

“It passed rapidly, but so close under our lee quarter that, had it been a man of my acquaintance, I should have easily recognised his features with the naked eye; and it did not, either in approaching the ship or after it had passed our wake, deviate in the slightest degree from its course to the S.W., which it held on at the pace of from twelve to fifteen miles per hour, apparently on some determined purpose.”

The log confirms the captain's report, and the officer of the watch, Drum-

mond, made a separate report to the *Zoologist* Professor Owen, the celebrated antagonist of Darwin, sarcastically criticised M'Quhae's report, and brought forth a strong retort from Her Majesty's fighting captain. Professor Owen referred to the Pontoppidan report of the Norwegian sea serpent, or Kraken, which had whiskers, as the origin of M'Quhae's sighting of a mane on his sea serpent.

"I beg to assure him," said M'Quhae, "that old Pontoppidan having clothed his sea serpent with mane could not have suggested the idea of ornamenting the creature seen from the *Daedalus* with a similar appendage, for the simple reason that I had never seen his account, or even heard of his sea serpent, until my arrival in London. Some other solution must therefore be found for the very

remarkable coincidence."

South Africa was drawn into the Loch Ness controversy by a London newspaper recalling a Simon's Town "monster" of 1925 (probably a sea lion). Stranger creatures than this, however, have been reported in Union Waters, and by ships sailing the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

I cannot convince myself that sea serpents still call at Table Bay, though they may have done so "before the days of steam." But, as sea serpents are so often in the news, I have collected a few more "authenticated instances" of their appearance.

A sea serpent was seen and fired at by Dr. Biccard about 150 yards off Green Point lighthouse in February, 1857, and the monster was described as about 200 feet long.

A marine creature 57 feet long was actually killed by the stem of the Armadale Castle in 1905 in latitude 3 deg. south, and nicknamed "Piscis Rudyardensis" because Mr. Kipling was on board at the time. A Cape Town man, Mr. Gibbs, confirmed this encounter. "I was aboard when the incident happened," Mr. Gibbs told me. "I was a child, and I remember that Mr. Rudyard Kipling was telling us a story when the bo'sun told us to go forward to see a sea serpent which we had rammed, and which could not escape from the bows of the ship.

"The tail of the monster reached from the bows to the ship's carpenter's porthole, 48 feet away, and its head was about 9 feet from the bow on the other side of the ship.

"As the monster could not escape, the ship's engines were reversed. Even-

tually it slipped off and sank." That would be the most authentic sea serpent story I have heard were it not for the fact that Mr. Gibbs finally declared that the monster was a shark and not a snake. Anyway, it gave Kipling the idea for one of his finest short stories.

Lieut.-Commander R. T. Gould, R.N., author of *The Case for the Sea Serpent*, sums up as follows: "To my mind the evidence available at present goes all the way to demonstrate the real existence of more than one type of creature not yet scientifically described."

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* declares: "While, with very few exceptions, all the so-called 'sea serpents' can be explained by reference to some well-known animal or other natural object, there is still a

residuum sufficient to prevent modern zoologists from denying the possibility that some such creature may after all exist.”

Probably the queerest creature ever reported on the South African coast was the “Margate monster” described by Mr. Hugh Chicheley Ballance on the morning of November 1, 1922. Margate is on the Natal south coast. Mr. Ballance was looking out to sea when he observed two whales fighting with some sea monster about 1300 yards from the shore.

“I got my field-glasses and was amazed to see what I took to be a polar bear, but of truly mammoth proportions,” runs Mr. Ballance’s affidavit in the Maritzburg archives. “When the two whales finally made off I saw that the creature’s body was covered with white hair.”

The creature was washed ashore by the tide that night, and lay on the beach, where many people saw it, for ten days. Mr. Ballance’s description of it is as follows :

“It was 47 feet long, 10 feet in breadth and nearly 5 feet high. At one end of it was a kind of elephantine trunk, 5 feet long, with a snout like a pig. It had a tail 2 feet thick and 10 feet long. It was clothed in coarse snow-white hair.

“The backbone was the most prominent feature of the monster’s body, but it could neither be sawn nor chopped. This convinced me that it was a denizen from the lowest depths of the ocean, for its frame was constructed to withstand great pressure.”

Sir Sidney Harmer, writing from the British Museum, was greatly interested in Mr. Ballance’s story. Mr.

E. Warren, Director of the Natal Museum, was asked for a verdict, but replied: "regret I can make very little of the account. With the exception of the Polar bear, long hair is unknown on marine animals."

The story is important, for very few unidentified sea monsters have been washed ashore – they have been glimpsed, as a rule, only for short periods in mid-ocean.

Huge snakes have been killed in some of the African great lakes, and such real encounters lend colour to stories such as the Zulu legend of a gigantic serpent in St. Lucia Bay and the famous Great Snake of the Orange River. The St. Lucia monster was reported as recently as July, 1933, by eight Europeans. They saw it in clear moonlight – "a long, black, snake-like creature about thirty yards long, with

an undulating body and head and shoulders similar to a hornless ox."

An oar fish, or "king of the herrings," was washed ashore in the Cape Peninsula a few years ago, but this was only 8 feet long. The sea snake is fairly common in South African waters, but they do not reach great lengths.

"A strange animal with a head resembling that of a human, a dark smooth body thicker than an average man's and measuring sixteen feet in length." This was the description given by the skipper of a fishing-boat casting its nets in a beautiful stretch of water where I have often sailed – the lagoon at Langebaan. Nothing like this strange sea creature has ever been seen in the lagoon before. It might well have become a legend, but the creature was identified soon afterwards as a

dugong, an inoffensive mammal common on the East African coast. The dugong carries its baby under the arm. It is indeed not unlike a human being, and many a tale of mermaids started, no doubt, when wondering sailor men sighted a dugong and heard its shrill cry.

The enormous fish such as skates, sharks and stingrays are creatures of the dawn world. They were in existence when dinosaurs wallowed on the primeval coast-lines, and they are large because they were forced to battle for life with those monsters. Sting-rays are really sharks in a flattened form – specimens nearly twenty feet across the “wings,” or side fins, have been captured off the South African coast. I have seen them skidding across the surface of Saldanha Bay in a series of sensational

ricochets, covering 100 yards in a few seconds. Giant and sinister fish indeed are these.

The swordfish, though uncommon, is not unknown in Union waters. Large specimens run up to 900 lbs. in weight, and they can drive their ivory “swords” deep into the planking of a wooden ship. It sometimes happens that a swordfish mistakes the hull of a ship for its hereditary enemy, the shark. Then there is a naval engagement ending in a broken sword, and often a damaged boat. On one famous occasion H.M.S. Leopard, an old oak ship, was rammed in this way. The sword penetrated an inch of copper sheathing and 71 inches of wood.

This is the story of the toilers of the “trek-nets,” the fishermen of Table

Bay and the waters that break upon the Cape of Storms.

Countless adventures with heavy weather, strange sea creatures and the peril of the sea have gone unrecorded since the rich fishing grounds of the Cape were first discovered. Yet a bold tradition has been built up by the men who work in open boats. Their daily lives, their escapes and achievements form a stirring page in the drama of South Africa.

Crowds still gather when the bulging net of harders or maasbankers is hauled, glistening, into the shallows. The work has an elemental appeal. This is the scene that must be counted among the earliest memories of all who lived in Cape Town as children.

“Draw the net for some fish for the crew,” ordered Johan van Riebeeck on

the day he reached Table Bay as Governor of the Cape for the Dutch East India Company. Today there are still fishermen drawing nets of very much the same type, using open boats of the old design, and landing their catches on Cape Town’s doorstep.

If you drive along the shores of Table Bay on a calm summer morning soon after the dawn you may see a blue jerseyed man making a smoke fire on the beach. He is the “land skipper” of a boat waiting offshore for his signal. A dozen signs the inexperienced eye would miss speak plainly to him of the presence of shoals of fish. He sees the broken water, the birds diving. The smoke he sends up means the fish are far out. Sometimes he points or whistles, occasionally he throws up sand as a mark of urgency. The boat skipper follows every movement while

the crew strain at the oars.

First the 60-fathom rope must be brought to the shore. Then begins the race to surround the shoal with the finely-meshed net. Fathom after fathom goes sweeping over the stern as the boat careers in a strenuous arc. At last 150 fathoms are out and the boat returns to the shore, the men go over the side, waist-deep, and drag the lines that hold the seine and its burden.

Where the beach is smooth and sandy there is no risk – unless the weight of the catch itself breaks the net. Fishing skippers carry in their minds a complete picture of the shores along which they work. Every rock and submerged wreck is engraved on that invisible chart. For a new “trek-net” costs £130 and is easily torn. Even when all the known obstructions are avoided there are movements, after

severe gales, of heavy timber embedded in the sand. Thus the fishermen are always adding new sections to old nets. They can never tell the age of a net; it has been patched so often that it remains in use long after the original twine has disappeared. Great faith is shown in the value of sun-drying, steaming and “bleeding” to preserve nets.

Many of the coloured skippers of Table Bay own their boats: A 20-footer of the familiar carvel-built design costs about £80, with a further £10 for the large spritsail and other gear. This is about the largest boat which can be beached safely and carried by the crew above high-water mark-important limiting factors. I do not think there is a coast in the world where open fishing boats are more ably handled under sail, in waters

where the summer south-easters blow with hurricane force and the north-westerners of winter bring in grey backed combers of terrifying heights. Naturally, the fishermen pick their weather. But they are “caught out” often enough, and it is then that these coloured skippers display magnificent qualities of seamanship.

In a violent south-easter they will sometimes run for shelter at Dassen Island, 36 miles north of Cape town. I know what it is to beat up from there tack after tack with every sheet and every inch of canvas straining, in a decked, deep-keeled yacht. The old Gape fishermen, in the days before motors, made the weary passage in open boats.

They work on a share system that must have originated centuries ago. Twelve shares there are, two for the vulnerable

net, one for the boat, and one and a half for the skipper. The price of the rest of the catch goes to the eight men forming the crew. It is a gamble which possesses a great appeal. When the net lands 30,000 harders successfully there will be several pounds for each man. In the summer, between the south-east gales, a fisherman may earn £8 a week. Then there are days of inactivity when not even the powerful decked motor-boats may leave harbour.

Trek-nets are used throughout the year, whenever conditions are favourable. The fishermen vary their employment at the different seasons, however, and roam the coast for hundreds of miles in larger craft. January finds most of them out in motor-boats that tow fleets of dinghies and work close inshore where the

crawfish (the tasty “Cape lobster”) swim among the seaweed and the rocks. In May the voracious hordes of snoek (named after the freshwater pike of Holland, but really a barracuda) arrive in Table Bay. A good snoek season means prosperity for the coloured people of Cape Town. It is their chief table delicacy, though only in recent years have the smart hotels realised its qualities and served the magnificent grilled snoek.

Snoek are caught by each boat’s crew at the rate of a thousand to three thousand a day. The skill lies entirely in the manner in which this struggling, sharp-finned, 7-lb. fish is hauled in and killed. It leaps madly for hooks decorated with red rags or shark-skin, and is captured easily on a plain, unbarbed hook. It fights all the way to the deck, and even the cleverest hands

receive poisonous wounds in the course of a season.

When the snoek vanish on their mysterious migration the fishermen turn to less feverish line fishing. September brings the opening of another long crawfish season.

But, as I have said, the trek-nets are never stowed away. There are still dark nights when, as an old fisherman described it to me, “the water is on fire with fish.” Boats are used, and also a small type of trek-net which is carried into the surf from the beach by four men. I recall a night on Blaauwberg beach when I accompanied a night trekking party and took part in the blind haul. A spot is chosen where fish might be expected to be found. There is no certainty. The net is carefully stacked to run easily, and the leader rushes chest-deep into the cold

breakers while the others follow, dropping the 90 yards of net in the effort to surround the fish before they can escape. It is all over in a couple of minutes. The net cannot be cast again that tide at the same place, for fish are easily frightened. Results of a night trek may be both dangerous and spectacular, for fish of many species come in to feed in the darkness and the haul often provides the variety of an aquarium. A sudden cry of “pael stert” warns the bare-legged men that a creature with a tail like a whip is floundering in the net. If the poisoned barb strikes flesh a foot or a hand may be lost. Then there is the electric skate, with an organ between the head and pectoral fins which delivers a shock powerful enough to send a man flat on his back. Sand-sharks are flung contemptuously aside. If the fishermen

are lucky there are thousands of galjoen, steenbras or harders in the bag.

Galjoen is one of many romantic Cape fish-names. Apparently the early fishermen found something in common between this fish and the galleons that called at the Cape. A bright-hued fish was called the “dageraad” – the day dawn. And most vivid of all is the “jacobiver,” derived from Jacob Evertson, a well-known master-mariner. Evertson traded between the Cape and the East Indies. His red face was pitted with smallpox and patchy with black beard, and his eyes bulged unpleasantly. While no portrait of the captain exists the jacobiver fish is said to perpetuate the likeness. Most of the Dutch fish-names were bestowed by van Riebeeck and his men. Van Riebeeck

gave his garrison so much fish that there was talk of a mutiny, the soldiers angrily demanding beef or pork. The strong little Governor then increased the fish ration, adding penguins and other sea-birds, "to show that we will not submit to orders from the herd." Evidently he was a lover of fish, for he refers to an early catch as: "Brems and other fishes of more delicate flavour than any fish of the Fatherland."

Fishing was forbidden for months at a time after ships in Table Bay had been driven ashore. The company's officials feared looting. In a gale of 1722 seven Dutch East Indiamen and three English ships were lost, six hundred sailors perished, and cargoes, valued at a quarter of a million pounds, littered the beaches. Gallows were then set up on the shore, and men caught

searching the wreckage were hanged on the spot. When the fishermen were once again allowed to use their nets, between the jetty and Salt River, it was ordered that the boats should be brought to the wharf near the Castle at night and secured with chains.

I asked an old Table Bay fisherman whether he had ever brought up any valuable relic in his nets. He shook his head; but he told me of the Woodstock crew who raised their nets with a tremendous effort one day and saw an old-fashioned brass cannon. Then the nets broke.

Once I saw a huge school of porpoises trapped in a fringe of kelp off Woodstock beach, and hunted by fishermen with harpoons. Wounded porpoises dashed in frenzied circles, blowing red jets into the air and jumping clear of the water on to the

beach. Porpoise steaks taste like pork. The beach was a butcher's shop that day.

Sharks occasionally take the fishermen's bait. in Table Bay, but the man-eater seldom becomes a menace. Nevertheless, fishing boats have been attacked. Only a few years ago I saw broken shark's teeth removed from the keel of a Blaauwberg boat. There, too, I heard the story of a shark-hunt in which Mr. Stubbs, a Cape Treasury official, flung the harpoon. For a time the shark towed the boat; then it turned and gripped the planking. They cut the shark adrift and made the beach with the boat filling rapidly. The blind rage of a wounded shark may not be so awe-inspiring as that of a harpooned whale, but it is dangerous enough. A blow from the tail of a shark weighing four tons (such as the Hout Bay

fishermen captured a few years ago) is sufficient to crack the side of a boat.

A beach that will always be remembered as the very essence of old Cape Town and the landing-place of generations of fishermen was Rogge Bay. It seems only the other day that I stood there watching a dying sea elephant haul up on the shore there and lie gasping on the sand. Yet Rogge Bay has vanished under the reclamation scheme. The Malays who made a daily scene of gay colour and energy have departed.

There: for two hundred years at least, the boats rested in a neat crescent, bows pointing seawards. Before daybreak the fishermen would come down with their yellow oilskins and stagger down to the water's edge under the heavy burden of the boats. As day broke the whole fleet would be

seen under sail beyond the breakwater. In the evening the boats came in with their blue and silver cargoes. They beached them stern first (as they still do), an unusual custom of the Cape, which was probably adopted to lessen the risk of broaching-to in the surf. Malay wives in brilliant clothes, turbaned priests and an army of fezzed small boys awaited the landing of the catch. Fish hawkers carried baskets yoked across their shoulders. Fish carts drove away to the sound of triumphant fanfares played on tin horns. Fish were kept alive in tanks near the square white fish market. Salting and curing took place on the beach. Sea birds fought for offal. The modern view may be cleaner, but the fascinating scene of Rogge Bay has been buried.

Years ago the custom was established

of naming the boats after the daughters of the owner or skipper, and today many a *Johanna* and *Ragema*, *Fatima* and *Ellen* sails after the fish shoals. Seldom is a name changed. That, of course, is a superstition of the sea found everywhere. The Cape fishermen observe a few odd beliefs of their own. Bad luck is inevitable, they say, if a man in the boat mentions the word "monkey." On the beach, monkey talk is harmless; but once the boat is launched, all discussion of the tribe is banned.

There are ghosts, too, on the fishing-grounds. At one well-known place a spectral hound with flaming eyes rushes along the beach to warn the fishermen that danger is at hand. Another stretch of water is haunted by an old Malay fisherman who raises his arm three times and then sinks beneath

the waves satisfied that he has done everything possible to avert disaster. No doubt there are still fishermen who propitiate the spirits of the deep by making up bunches of small fish and throwing them overboard:

While many Malays still haul their nets, the industry is no longer entirely in their hands. Numbers of Italian (mainly Sicilian) fishermen came to the Cape early this century. They brought with them qualities of skill, energy and patience and new ideas about boats, which have greatly extended the inshore fisheries of the Cape. The Philippine Islands contributed a number of sailors to the Cape fishing fleet about a century ago. They deserted from a Spanish ship and settled at Kalk Bay. From time to time they were joined by fellow countrymen. They suffered greatly in the

smallpox epidemic of 1882, but their descendants still form a distinct community, the backbone of the Kalk Bay fishing trade.

Such is the fleet that sails without flags. The crews face all the vicissitudes of the sea, relying sturdily on their own strong arms to grasp a living from the waters. One wishes them full nets and the seasons that Cape Town knew long ago, when a million snoek were caught each year and there was rejoicing in all the homes of the fishermen.

5

Table Bay, a treacherous anchorage before the breakwater was built, has claimed more good ships than any other port in the Southern Hemisphere. I have studied a list of these wrecks; more than three hundred and fifty of

them, with cargoes once worth millions. Here, you say, there must be treasure; golden pieces in the sandy floor of the old “Bay of Storms.”

Certainly there is a gleam of gold in the records, though it is not surprising to find that the richest hoards are those lying in the deepest water, in the most exposed parts of Table Bay. The Dutch East India Company never allowed a sunken treasure to rest undisturbed for long if it could be recovered. Never-the-less, the finds that have been made by dredgers and divers prove that there is a wealth of interesting relics still within reach of man.

One salvage company, at all events, has found the evidence promising enough to equip a suction-dredger with gear for lifting any treasure lying in fairly shallow water. When the fine

summer weather comes she will search the bay as a vacuum cleaner sweeps a house. Aeroplanes, inverted periscopes and divers have located a number of wrecks.

The efforts of the salvage company, of course, may not be rewarded by chests of golden coins. Divers may stumble across nothing more valuable than the carved stern of a galleon or a cannon bearing the Portuguese coat of arms. Yet these sunken ships are worth searching. “Lucky in one job and unlucky the next time – that’s salvage,” the oldest diver on the South African coast once said to me.

Let us peer through the green waters of Table Bay where the bones of the lost ships lie embedded in the sand, so that the past becomes alive and the dramas of these old sea disasters are played again. Robben Island first – the

grave of many ships. In the past this was an island of suffering and exile. They have dynamited the leper hospitals, but that air of old tragedy clings to the ruins. Even a stranger, knowing nothing of the island's story, would sense it. If there is a place in the world where restless ghosts prowls round broken walls, it is Robben Island.

Ghosts of Portuguese sailors, the earliest settlers; of Dutch East India Company men, ordered there to hunt the seals; and assuredly the unhappy spirits of those ten Englishmen, sentenced at the Old Bailey in 1614, who were the first prisoners to be banished to the island. Ghosts of drowned seamen, too, still haunting the shattered decks of sunken caravel, galleon and steamer, and guarding their rich cargoes.

Those were my thoughts when I lay off the island one night in my little yacht at anchor in Murray Bay. Landing in the sunlight of a Sunday morning, I pictured the busy life of the island as I had so often seen it before the evacuation. Prison warders and hospital attendants fishing from the jetty. Healthy-looking nurses in the streets-one of them swam across the ice-cold bay to the mainland just to show what an island girl could do.

Hospitality everywhere in those days; in the mansion of the Commissioner, at dances in the club, in all the homes of the island. Picnics in fields of lilies, and on the beach on the far side where even now bright beads are washed ashore occasionally from a lost ship. More valuable flotsam than beads has been picked up by children playing in the rocky pools-golden ducats, silver

pieces of eight.

You can see the rusty iron, the boilers and stumps of masts of the wrecks of recent years along the northern shore. But of two famous vessels lost there, which stand out in my mind from a long and tragic procession of doomed ships, nothing remains above the surface. One was the mail steamer *Tantallon Castle*, piled up in the early morning of May 7, 1901, in dense fog with one hundred and twenty passengers on board. The other was the *Dageraad*.

Enough is known of the *Dageraad* to establish, beyond doubt, that she was a treasure-ship. She was one of a fleet that sailed north from Table Bay in 1694 to save the cargo of a distressed Dutch East India Company ship named the *Goude Buys* – the Golden Jacket. News had reached the Cape

that the *Goude Buys*, after a long passage from Holland, had anchored about a hundred miles up the coast with every soul on board ill. Scurvy, of course – the dread sickness which took such heavy toll of the mariners of Holland then, and for years afterwards. Some of the wretched crew of the *Goude Buys* had landed and tramped overland to the Cape, several perishing of hunger on the march.

When the *Dageraad*, a small, fast yacht, reached the spot the *Goude Buys* had dragged her anchors and drifted ashore. The coast where she lay, however, is sandy and free from danger; it was easy to save her specie and cargo.

With much precious freight under hatches the *Dageraad* ran back to Table Bay. Fog caused her end, too – she sailed on to the west side of

Robben Island and broke up at once. Sixteen of her men were drowned. It was recorded at the time that “the broken chests washed ashore, but the money is still under the sea.”

And there most of it lies to this day, in the sand of the green depths beneath the long coils of seaweed, caressed by every tide in the strong-room of the cold South Atlantic. Golden coins, no doubt, with guilders and rix-dollars – a romantic hoard awaiting recovery by some diver bold enough to go down there in the sweep and surge of the open ocean.

Silver would be worth salving if there was a prospect of the divers finding substantial quantities within a reasonable time. Many ships, which undoubtedly contain silver, have been located, and divers have been down to them in the past – sometimes with

successful results.

Near Camps Bay, for example, lies the submerged wreck of *Het Huis te Crayenstein*, which ran on the rocks one day in 1698 “at the third glass of the dog watch.” The company reported to Holland: “Out of 19 chests of money, 16 were recovered. The rest had evidently been broken open and the contents hurriedly abstracted, as was evident from the few pieces found lying about in the saloon and others picked up on the shore, showing that the thieves must have carried their booty up the mountain and hidden it there.”

Governor Simon van der Stel visited the scene of the wreck and learned that two of the lost chests had been torn from their cleats and had probably slid through the large square ports into the sea.

At least two attempts have been made by divers to recover this authentic treasure. One salvage enterprise in the 'eighties of last century brought up brass guns and broken crockery. Another search party, organised by Mr. A. M. Carroll between 1903 and 1908, succeeded in locating the wreck.

Similarly, there is no doubt that the well-known *Meresteyn* wreck, off Jutten Island, Saldanha Bay, contains boxes of silver coins. The *Meresteyn* was lost there in April, 1702, and broke up before the money could be saved. Since then a number of sea-worn coins, Spanish ducatoons, have been washed ashore on Jutten Island. The Dutch East India Company made prolonged efforts to reach the rest of the treasure, but failed for the same reason that modern divers might fail. The wreck lies in an exposed position,

and can seldom be reached. If all the ducatoons scattered on the seabed round the *Meresteyn* were collected they might not cover the expenses of the salvage expedition.

Ships' bells are always prized by levers of the sea; and many bells have been found by divers in Table Bay. About forty years ago the bell of the *Arniston*, which had been under water since 1792, was recovered near the mouth of the Salt River. Near this spot, too, the wreck of the famous East Indiaman, *De Jonge Thomas*, was located. A diver named John Steyn worked on the wreck for a couple of months, finding about a thousand of the silver coins known as rix-dollars. He also salvaged many rolls of light-brown silk, the inner portions were in perfect condition. There were barrels of china cups and saucers, too; all

these fragile articles being packed in pepper-corns.

Improved diving apparatus led to a boom in this salvage of valuables from Table Bay wrecks. Some of the divers quarrelled, and there were fights beneath the water. At last the Government withdrew all treasure seeking concessions.

Today a licence to search “sunken and abandoned wrecks” is not difficult to obtain. The Government claims 15 per cent of treasure-trove recovered – a modest share of the hoard of jewels and coins which may be hauled to the surface of Table Bay one day.

CHAPTER 9

MEN AGAINST BEASTS

FROM the day the first patches of ground were cultivated on the shores of Table Bay the South African farmer has carried on unending warfare against wild beasts. It is a battle fought with guns, poisons, barricades and traps, claw and fang, ruthless feet and gigantic appetites.

The struggle has spread northwards far into tropical Africa. Sometimes the farmer drives his enemies out, but in huge areas he is kept on the defensive without hope of armistice.

Lions and leopards roamed the vineyards planted by van Riebeeck, first Dutch Governor of the Cape, nearly three hundred years ago. They raided his cattle and became so troublesome that the Governor started

a system which is still in force – he offered a reward of 25s. for each lion or leopard killed. Though the lions have been driven northwards Cape farmers are still claiming rewards for leopards. This last dangerous animal lives on in the midst of civilisation by its extreme cunning in hiding its movements and the fact that it chooses the most inaccessible places for its lair. Leopards are seldom seen except when they are caught in traps. It is believed that one last leopard remains on Table Mountain, preying on the troops of baboons and poultry. A leopard weighing 85 pounds was caught within sight of Table Mountain a few years ago. In the Worcester district leopards are common. They have raided the flocks in daylight, frightened climbers in the mountains and killed large numbers of sheep.

Indeed, there is no part of Southern Africa from which the leopard has completely disappeared. The harsh cough of the leopard – not unlike the lion's roar – may be heard throughout Union territory. The district which is, I think, more heavily infested than any other farming area I have visited is the Gobabis frontier of South-West Africa. There, even in recent years, several farmers have been fatally mauled by leopards.

Two brothers, named Brandt, were riding on horseback along a farm-track near Gobabis when they saw a leopard cub rolling playfully in the sun. The younger brother picked up the cub and they rode off. Suddenly they heard a snarling and found they were being followed by the mother. The elder Brandt fired and missed. A second shot wounded the leopard, but a

moment later it sprang upon the younger brother's horse and tore him from the saddle. He was severely bitten and scratched before the rifle could be safely aimed to kill the leopard. The elder Brandt carried his brother on his horse for fifty miles to the doctor, but in vain. The wounds inevitably became septic, and five days afterwards the man died.

Gustav Jentzsch, another farmer in South-West Africa who had suffered great losses through raids by leopards, built iron-cage traps. He found a leopard trapped one day, but failed to notice that one bar of the cage had been loosened by the leopard. As he stared at the furious beast a paw thrust out, caught him and inflicted such wounds that he died.

Lions menace the stock farmers in the Gobabis district – bold Kalahari lions

that know no fear when they are hungry. Two lions entered a cattle-pen in the centre of Gobabis town one night a few years ago, killed two calves and devoured them in the main street. Goats and donkeys are often carried off by lions from outlying villages and farms.

Professional lion-hunters have been employed to protect the cattle on some of the enormous ranches of Rhodesia. Yank Allen shot lions as a business on Liebig's ranch just north of the Limpopo – a great, raw-boned, slow-talking man from Texas. He called lions "dawgs," and when he had shot three hundred he stopped counting, but went on shooting. Yank died of pneumonia.

Komatipoort, the Transvaal town on the border of Portuguese East Africa, is another place where lions prowl in the streets at night. Every year

hundreds of head of cattle are destroyed by lions. Fortunately, there is a young stock inspector in the area, Mr. F. P. van Oudtshoorn, who has made lion-hunting his hobby. He shoots more lions in his spare time than many a professional hunter. The natives call him Mashaya Ngwen Yama, the "Lion Killer." And his hunting-ground is within three hundred miles of the skyscrapers of Johannesburg. Once he shot five lions within four days. Never a month passes without Mr. van Oudtshoorn adding another notch to his rifle butt.

Presence of mind saved him on the only occasion when (in his opinion) he was close to death. He had heard that three lions were asleep in the bush two miles from Komatipoort. Taking an armed native and a pack of trained dogs with him he set off on foot into

the dense bush. Other natives joined them to act as beaters and the hunt began.

Mr. van Oudtshoorn heard shots in the bush, followed by shouts, but he could not understand what had happened. A messenger arrived to tell him that the lions were making for the open, and he ran to intercept them.

First a male lion appeared. Mr. van Oudtshoorn fired, the lion roared and passed on. A few seconds later a lioness charged without warning. The natives leapt for the trees. The hunter stood alone in the darkness with only two cartridges in his rifle.

"I decided to jump for a tree, as there was no certainty of killing the lioness with two shots," he said afterwards. "There was no time to climb high. I simply gripped a branch four feet from

the ground, swung up to it, and felt the lioness blunder directly beneath me. That was my narrowest escape."

There is no fear of the lion becoming extinct in Africa. In the Masai country, East Africa, not long ago lions were breeding at such a rate that the Government organised a corps of hunters to thin them out. One man killed three hundred lions during that campaign – more than Selous and other famous shots killed with their muzzle-loaders during their whole careers. The Masai tackle lions with long spears and shields. When they were disarmed after showing signs of unrest some years ago the chiefs pointed out that the people were no longer able to defend their cattle against lions. It was true. They could not live without weapons, and the spears were returned.

But the fact remains that lion-hunting has not yet become child's play. In the words of one of the most experienced hunters of modern times: "Hunting lions is not like hunting rabbits. They very rarely do what you want them to do. Lions are as cunning, cute, watchful and alert as any man who ever hunted them." Records were kept in East Africa one year of forty white men who hunted lions. Twenty of them were mauled – ten with fatal results.

From the farmer's point of view, the villainy of wild elephants surpasses the meat hunger of the lion. In Uganda it is estimated that elephants destroy three and a half million tons of vegetation every year, including many banana plantations and crops. They trample down this growth not only for the sake of food, but through sheer

love of destruction. Men directed by the game warden have destroyed 17,000 elephants during the past twelve years; but the elephants appear to be as plentiful as they were when the campaign opened.

One elephant may create havoc round lonely native settlements for generations. The Bamangwato tribe recently hunted a "rogue" elephant which had trampled down huts and killed three children on the north-east border of Bechuanaland. It was an elephant known to the oldest men of the tribe; known by its huge footprints measuring 21 inches across. They sent 500 beaters into the bush after it, but the cunning old tusker escaped.

There is another notorious lone bull in Uganda, called Kisassa by the natives. In one night Kisassa pushed over fifty banana trees. Game wardens, hunters

and settlers have all tried in vain to come within range of this elephant.

The task of protecting native crops, cattle and the people themselves means constant employment for skilled white hunters in Tanganyika. Within a year an official sent to the Rufiji River area had accounted for 300 elephants, 900 hippo and 27 man-eating lions. He was assisted by trained native "scouts" of course, but the dangerous job was splendidly done. Without exaggeration, these men risk their lives every day, and do it for a salary of £20 a month.

An elephant herd swooping down on a farm makes one of Africa's most terrifying sights. It has been compared with a street full of runaway steam-rollers! The great beasts crash through the darkness uprooting trees, flattening

huts and outbuildings, screaming and trumpeting, trampling the irrigation furrows, tearing up fences and devouring all that suits their taste. Even the motorist on the Great North Road through Africa is not safe while the herds roam unchecked.

An angry elephant, maddened by red ants in its trunk or wounded in the chase, will seize a native and pull him limb from limb.

It has now been established that the period of gestation of the African elephant is the same as the Indian, twenty-two months. An adult female elephant has a calf every two years. Thus thousands must be destroyed to keep the elephant population within reasonable limits.

In the northern territory of South-West Africa, the last settled area on the edge

of the unmapped Kaokoveld, the farmers have appealed again and again for permission to shoot marauding elephants. The wild herds charge through fences in search of water. One farmer built a great palisade of Kameeldoorn trees round his reservoirs and tanks. It was a waste of effort. The elephants barged through the obstruction and drank their fill, leaving little water for the unhappy farmer's stock.

These elephants have become so bold that the farmers never feel safe without their rifles. A few years ago a farmer was swimming in his dam when he looked up into the malicious eyes of an elephant that was swinging its trunk in an attempt to grip him. The farmer swam to the far side, where he had left his gun, fired five shots and dropped the elephant.

Elephants rank as a royal game in South-West Africa. The farmer who cannot prove that he shot in self-defence will pay a heavy fine.

When grazing and water become scarce in the wide areas beyond the farming settlements of South-West Africa, hordes of wild animals stampede and overrun the farms. Zebras come in their thousands, devouring the pastures. Gemsbok, driven out of the Namib desert, arrive in emaciated condition and invade all unfenced land. Wild dogs, those cruel pests, race down on flocks of sheep, mutilating and killing. The presence of a pack of wild dogs on a farm means a reign of terror until every available gun has been brought to bear on them.

In the old settled districts of South Africa jackals still raid the sheep flocks, while baboons remain in count-

less thousands to rob the orchards, steal fowls and devastate the mealie fields. Anyone who has seen the number of sheep a jackal can mutilate in one night will agree that this pest cannot be tolerated in settled districts.

From 14,000 to 20,000 jackals are killed every year in the Cape Province of South Africa. Namaqualand and the North-West Cape are the infested areas from which huge “bags” are reported. The authorities in one Cape district became suspicious a few years ago when numbers of very young jackals were brought in – there appeared to be a secret breeding establishment in the neighbourhood. The rewards were paid, however, as the regulations did not close this loophole.

There is no more cunning animal on the veld than the jackal. Hunted,

trapped or poisoned everywhere, the jackal survives and breeds, climbs “vermin proof”, fences and retreats to its rocky lair with its loot. After killing and eating a sheep, the jackal takes a senseless delight in maiming the rest of the flock, so that dozens have to be slaughtered when the farmer finds them.

Attempts to tame the jackal are never completely successful. A jackal pup, captured when very young, may be an amusing pet for a time; but it will develop thieving and destructive habits within a few months.

Professional hunters are employed in some parts of the Cape to stamp out the pest. Often enough these men will spend days on the trail of one notorious jackal which has caused havoc among the sheep of the district. Such jackals are recognised by a typical

spoor – a marauder with a broken toe in the Riversdale-Albertina districts was shot after eleven years, during which period it had killed 4000 sheep. A reward of £60 was paid to the successful hunter.

A jackal which has been hunted many times will display wonderful skill in throwing the hounds off the scent, crossing streams, evading the pack in thick bush, and using the direction of the wind as a means of puzzling the dogs. Cornered at last, some jackals will turn with such loud snarls that even experienced hounds are afraid to attack.

The lair of a jackal may be in such an inaccessible spot that farmers are unable to reach it. The hounds, will wait at the entrance for days, often in vain. Dynamite has been used to frighten jackals out of their burrows.

Losses in the Cape Province caused by the depredations of the jackal were estimated, twenty years ago, at more than £1,000,000 a year. This was based not only on the actual value of the sheep killed, but on indirect losses resulting from the fact that the presence of jackals largely determined the system of farming. The farmer was forced to kraal his sheep, which added to the risk of disease. Sheep passing to and from the kraals trampled down the veld and formed paths which caused veld erosion. Thus the jackal was the prime cause of the severity of droughts!

Nevertheless there is one jackal which the people of Bechuanaland would be sorry to see exterminated – the famous silver jackal, which has yielded so many valuable karosses.

Such is the war that is being waged up

and down Africa, from the southern tip of the continent to the Sahara and the Nile. Farmers and wild beasts cannot live side by side.

2

Sundown in the gloomy forests of the French Congo, rain dripping from the palms and creepers. A white hunter and his native gun-bearer are striding through the damp moss, brushing off the tsetse flies as they seek a clear line of direction in a steamy green world without landmarks or trails.

Somewhere in this sweltering maze there is a bull elephant with 70-lb. tusks. The hunter has told his carriers to keep back, while he pushes forward hurriedly in the hope of a shot before night falls.

Now it is night, the elephant has vanished, the hunter has lost touch

with his carriers.

The hunter shouts, but there is no answer. He lights a fire, for the whining mosquitoes dislike smoke. As he stretches himself out wearily, lacking both supper and blankets, he wonders how long the carriers will take to find them. The gun-bearer declares that everything will be all right – he has snapped off twigs and branches right along the route, and the wise carriers will read the signs.

During the night the hunter is aware of sounds. “Boo-oom... tr-r-rap... boom!” “Drum voices are talking in the darkness. He rolls over, instantly awake and straining his ears to detect the source of the muffled rhythm. The drums roll on, but the deadening forest growths defeat his efforts.

In the morning they follow the

elephant tracks again. Hungry work, hard marching. That afternoon the hunter discusses the position with his gun-bearer and decides to wait for the carriers. They try to sleep in the rain.

Again comes the dull booming of the drums in the night silence. It is clear that the carriers have lost the trail, given up the search, and are now trying to guide their master back to safety by sounding the drums at the nearest village.

Tonight the match-box is wet and the mosquitoes cannot be kept at bay. It is still impossible to pick up the direction of the drums. The hunter finds some consolation in the thought that the drums cannot be farther than fifteen, at most twenty miles away.

At dusk on the third day the hunter is desperate. He has returned inevitably

to the spot where the first night was spent. Water they had found, but food was now a necessity. All night the drums give out their mocking rhythm.

At daybreak gun-bearer and hunter separate. The hunter totters away weakly through the trees, and within a minute he has found a beaten path. He fires a shot to recall the gun-bearer. They are safe.

The hunter who described this experience to me was Mr. John Molteno, grandson of Sir John Molteno, first Prime Minister of the Cape. After leaving Cambridge he spent years in tropical Africa, farming and elephant hunting. Mr. Molteno is now part owner of a gold mine on the Lupa River, Tanganyika. He has heard the drums in many far corners of Africa and has tried to solve the riddle of their meaning. Once he met an

American scientist, a Harvard graduate who had spent months listening to the signal drums – the famous “bush telegraph” that carries messages across vast areas of Africa.

“I do not believe any white man will ever be able to read a message beaten out on the drums of Africa,” declared the American. “You cannot get inside the brain of the African to discover why he thinks differently from the white man – though we know that his mental processes are different. The drum system is not an artificial Morse code – it is as natural as the negro’s instinct. It is a rhythm, like the negro’s speech, where one word has many meanings according to the pronunciation. There is no thought which cannot be expressed with the aid of the drums, no message so intricate that it cannot be thudded out into the night

by a skilful drummer.”

Molteno found strong confirmation of this view during his wanderings from the Nile to the Ubangi, from the Lake Chad country to Tanganyika. Warring tribes would forget their quarrels to relay a message that had come from the south and that would pass on hundreds of miles to the north. The drums sounded over rivers and international frontiers, just as they talked long before the white man set foot in Africa.

Some years ago Molteno was hunting elephant with a Russian partner along the remote upper reaches of the Ubangi. This river marks the boundary between French and Belgian territory. About three hundred miles up the river from the junction with the main stream of the Congo the partners visited a chief and attempted to enter into a

business alliance with him. They knew that a hostile cannibal tribe inhabited the hunting area, and that their ivory would be stolen unless the carriers received protection from this chief.

When the partners arrived the chief was drinking palm wine; he was drunk and insolent. During the argument that followed the excitable Russian struck the chief and an unpleasant situation developed. The chief's followers ran for their spears. Molteno and the Russian hurried to their canoes and paddled away downstream. They thought no more of the incident until they reached their base, a village several hundred miles from the scene of the row. There a friendly native met them and gave a detailed account of events at the chief's village. Molteno noted dates and times, and discovered that the news had come through by

drum signals within sixteen hours of their hasty farewell to the drunken chief.

The drums had erred in one detail, for the message had said that Molteno and the Russian had been arrested. Native friends of the Russian, scenting trouble with the authorities, had immediately buried unlicensed guns and ivory belonging to the partners.

Drum talk has a wide vocabulary. A Frenchman organised a motor-transport service in the Stanleyville district. Once he burst his tyres on a lonely bush-track and found that repairs were impossible. "Can you send a message to my brother in Stanleyville?" the Frenchman asked the nearest village headman.

Within a few hours natives on the outskirts of Stanleyville (150 miles

away) were reading the drum signals.

The exact position of the stranded Frenchman was given, and the message stated that he needed “new wheels.” Thus help was secured as surely as though the appeal had been written on a telegraph form.

John Molteno’s most amusing experience with the drums came when he was out hunting one day in a district where, according to the gun-bearer, there were no natives. The country had been devastated by sleeping sickness, villages had been abandoned, and Molteno was marching through an empty waste.

Suddenly his ears caught a distant tattoo – the unmistakable “thud-thud-thud” of sticks on hollow wood. He turned to the gun-bearer. “I thought you said there was no village here?”

The gun-bearer grinned. “Sokomotu,” he replied. “just like a man.” They walked cautiously towards the sound, and found a chimpanzee drumming on a fallen tree.

In the Congo and West Africa, where the art of drum signalling is most highly developed, drums are hollowed out of trees, with a long slit forming “lips” and allowing variations in sound. Leather-covered types of drums are also in use, the “operator” using more than one drum to send a message.

Every man in a village has his “drum name” – a fact which Molteno discovered when he visited the chiefs in search of carriers.

At first the chief would reply: “It is now nine in the morning, and the men are all away gathering honey and

watching their fish traps.”

“Call them up,” suggested Molteno. The chief would then send for his drummer, and one by one the men would return to the village. Similarly, a white man who is well known to the natives receives a drum name. The movements of officials are always broadcast, and no chief is ever taken by surprise when the administrator pays a call.

Pygmies dwell in the forests of both the French and the Belgian Congo, and Molteno was able to see these little hunters on many occasions. It is not easy to establish contact with them. Like the Bushmen of the Kalahari the pygmies are shy, wild creatures, living beyond the law, the most primitive of all human beings.

In the great equatorial forest that

begins near the West African coast and runs far into the interior Molteno reached a village of natives who had fled from the Belgians and taken refuge in French territory. The chief of this village had gained the confidence of the pygmies; his people had no dealings with them, but the chief himself could understand the pygmy language and gave the pygmies bananas and manioc in exchange for meat. This barter took place at night. If the pygmies saw anyone but the chief they bolted into the forest.

Molteno found his elephant-hunting hampered by a swamp. It was too deep to wade across, and the elephants always escaped through the water. So he arranged with the chief for a canoe to be dragged across country and launched on the swamp. By this means he penetrated a tract of forest where no

white man, perhaps, had ever been before. There followed a dramatic meeting with the little people.

“I saw pygmy footprints, followed them for miles and lost my way,” said Molteno. “Then I heard voices. I crept up to the edge of a clearing and found a large group of pygmies sitting round a fire. Their spears were stacked together with the points in the ground. Some of them were cutting up a wild pig, while others were taking honey out of a tree.

“I had two natives with me, and I told them to move forward quietly and take possession of the spears. The pygmies ran, but my natives called to them in a friendly way and the leader stopped. They informed him that there was a white man close at hand, one who would provide them with meat.

“Then I walked out. The timid pygmies gathered round me and I sat on a log. The pygmy leader spoke the language of one of my natives, so that I was able to carry on a conversation. I learnt that some of the pygmies had seen a white trader, but that this was the first time they had talked to a white man.

“I shared their pork and honey. While I ate, the pygmies ran about, cutting sticks and pieces of bark, building a shelter over me where I sat. They had seen a tropical storm approaching, and the rain came down just as they finished thatching the hut.

“The pygmies accompanied me on my elephant hunts. They moved swiftly and silently in the forest, so that I had difficulty in keeping pace with them. Often a pygmy would walk upright beneath a branch while I had to

crouch. I felt like Gulliver, and the pygmies certainly treated me as a giant from a strange world.

“Many a tight corner they led me into, in the belief, I suppose, that I was invincible. I would find myself unexpectedly among a herd of elephants. A cow elephant would scream the alarm, the pygmies would vanish, and I would have to depend on my elephant gun.

“The pygmies had their drums, and when I shot an elephant the news would travel and the tribe gather like vultures for the feast. Meat dominates their lives; they are forced to dig for roots when game is scarce. Pygmy huts are built like beehives, with a leafy tunnel leading up to the entrance. A smoke fire in the tunnel keeps the mosquitoes out. Two or three weeks pass, and the hut is abandoned as the

pygmies wander off to fresh hunting grounds.

“I kept one of the pygmies in my camp as a sort of hostage. One day the tribe vanished, and I asked this man the reason. ‘We knew very well that you did not come here to kill elephants – you came to eat us,’ said the pygmy simply. For hundreds of years cannibal raiders have descended on the pygmies, and the man could imagine no other explanation of my presence.”

Elephant-hunting, as a profession, no longer offers high rewards. When Molteno first set out over the western frontier of Uganda in quest of the great tuskers the market for ivory was good. He was twenty years old, he had handled a rifle since his schooldays, but he had never been on the elephant trail before. “I saw an elephant with tusks and fired – £150 at the nearest

trader's store," he told me.

For three years he roamed the elephant country, finding the most profitable field of enterprise in the French Congo. There an "unlimited licence" cost 10,000 francs (£80 at that time) and entitled the holder to shoot any animal in any numbers. It would have been a hunter's paradise but for the invasion of Portuguese and others who armed the natives and slaughtered the valuable bull elephants. In 1925 the system of sending out native hunters was stopped, and natives were allowed to carry nothing more modern than muzzle-loaders. These they used with varying degrees of success. They ramm'd in a charge of gunpowder and often carried a spear in the barrel instead of bullets. Sometimes they killed elephants, frequently they blew off their own heads.

Apart from the licence, the white hunter's expenses were not heavy. A spoon of salt would procure a chicken in any village. Tea and sugar were the only important things to be purchased. The hunter walked or travelled by canoe, living on the country.

"Before the elephant herds had been irritated by many hunters, it was a safe and easy game," Molteno told me. "The old hunter strolled up and knocked them over. Today the profession calls for more patience and hard work than any other kind of hunting. You follow the herd and come up with them about the third day. I have spent ten days following a herd, marching from dawn to dark. After shooting an elephant I would cut off the tail – the recognised proof of ownership – and leave five porters to guard the tusks.

"Once I slashed off a tail and hurried

on after the herd. When I returned there was no elephant. It had merely been stunned by the shot.”

The strangest character Molteno encountered during his long safaris was found neither among cannibals nor pygmies. The chance meeting occurred while the carriers were hauling the canoes through the rapids of a remote Congo stream. “Master, are you not going to see the white man?” one of the natives inquired.

Molteno had never imagined that a white man had settled at that spot, but he was shown a hut on the hillside and peered through the open entrance.

There was a white man, a Frenchman, who declared that he had lived there for ten years. He never moved outside the low grass hut. His face was as white as paper, but his manner was

polished and he still spoke perfect French. The natives brought him food – he had given them his rifle. Sometimes there was buffalo meat, always there were chickens and eggs. Yet it must have been a life of hardship, a barren life intellectually for a man of education. There was no furniture in the hut, not even a book. The elderly Frenchman sat on the mud floor, in rags, yet not without a trace of distinction and charm of manner.

This hermit has once moved in the highest circles in Paris. A scandal was hushed up, and the young nobleman found himself on the coast of Africa with an allowance which he spent regularly on champagne. The allowance stopped. The man drifted inland without ambition or desire to work. The hut by the river marked the end of the story.

John Molteno has grown wheat in East Africa. He has driven through the Cameroons in a motor-truck and through Southern Africa in a small car; and he has flown to his gold mine in a modern air liner. But some of his happiest days were lived at a slower pace, when the drums spoke of elephants and he set out on foot with tiny companions to bring back the ivory and satisfy the great meat hunger of the Congo pygmies.

CHAPTER 10

FLEETS INLAND

SHIPS that never smell salt water navigate the great lakes and rivers of Africa. A new motor liner was launched on Lake Nyasa recently – the *Mpasa*, of 500 tons, designed for carrying passengers and cargoes of cotton. Most of the ships that sail deep waters are to be seen in miniature on these inland waterways. Gunboats and peaceful traders; passenger vessels with the white-clad aristocrats of the tropics on their upper decks, black humanity packed tightly below; even hospital ships with operating theatres and radio transmitters. I have seen them all under the flags of Britain or France, Belgium or Portugal, lurching through storms, dodging waterspouts, booming through fogs across stretches of water thousands of feet above sea-

level. Naval engagements have been fought on these lakes. Steamers have encountered all manner of queer adventure, from collisions with floating islands to total loss.

A shipwreck in the heart of Africa is a more serious matter than an ocean disaster. First it means building a new vessel in some European shipyard to make sure that every part fits. Then she must be taken to pieces again and sent to Africa, like a gigantic jig-saw puzzle, to be assembled finally beside the waters where she will be used.

Imagine the African shipbuilders' task in the days before railways. Caravans of native porters had to transport the hundreds of parts from coast to lake on their heads and shoulders. Forty years ago a steamer 104 feet long, called the *William Mackinnon*, was carried in 60-lb. head loads from Mombasa to

Victoria Nyanza without the loss of a single plate or engine part in the bush. The engineers were then faced with heaps of steel plates, brass and copper pipes, sawn timber and machinery, a ship dissected and jumbled. No wonder the task, from first to last, took five years. Old hands in East Africa named the *William Mackinnon* the “Emetic,” for she rolled even in calm weather. At about the same period the Uganda Government imported a steamer from which Sir Clement Hill and others reported sighting a “sea serpent” in the lake.

You can travel by steamer for many hundreds of miles round Victoria Nyanza, calling at Bukoba and the coffee plantations; Mwanza, the pretty lake port built by the Germans; and Jinja, the source of the Nile.

Similar difficulties in transporting

steamers overland were experienced by the Belgians in the Congo. There is one trail from Matadi that a French writer called “that route for human pack animals staked out with corpses.” Joseph Conrad, as a boy, placed his finger on the map of that country and declared: “When I grow up I shall go there.” Years afterwards he commanded a Congo river steamer, suffering much ill-health, but gathering the ideas of his work *Heart of Darkness*.

H. M. Stanley, of course, was the pioneer of the great Congo waterways. There he left his famous barge, *Lady Alice*, far from the ocean breeze. Her resting-place was pointed out to me as I travelled down to the Congo mouth from Kinshasa some years ago. The *Lady Alice* was an exploring vessel indeed – a cedar-built craft 40 feet long and constructed in five sections

so that porters could carry her where she would not float. With this boat Stanley made many of his discoveries; in that frail hull he fought off the attacks of savages and wild animals. In the end Stanley had the *Lady Alice* dragged up a great cluster of boulders near the Isangila cataract, there to fall to pieces under the burning sun where no unfriendly hands could find her.

Stanley brought out a flotilla of steamers and lighters when he established the Congo Free State in the eighties of last century – ships that gave faithful service long after the explorer had passed. He dynamited a wagon-road round the rapids, through mountains and forests, to take the steamer parts inland. This was the feat that gained for him the native name of “Bula Matadi” the rock-breaker – a name by which government officials

are still known in the Belgian Congo. Thus he was able to assemble a fleet of ships on the banks of Stanley Pool with 1000 miles of the Congo and 6000 miles of tributaries open to navigation.

Steel boats were carried by Stanley’s army of porters during the search for the mysterious Emin Pasha. No doubt there are parts of these boats lying where they were dropped in the forests long ago. Emin Pasha, incidentally, put the first steamer on Lake Albert – “the iron canoe with the tree that spouts fire,” as the natives called her. Today a fine vessel of 750 tons, the *Robert Coryndon*, furrows those waters 1000 miles from the nearest sea.

I have pleasant memories of two steamers, *Prince Leopold* and *Prince Charles*, that carried me down the

Lualaba River in the Belgian Congo. Along the Congo itself, the main river, were larger ships – the *Michelin*, an 800-tonner, the *Tabora* and the huge *Kigoma*, once a Mississippi packet. But in those days the ships were not luxurious. “Meals are supplied in the restaurant,” said an official pamphlet, “but passengers should supply themselves with food to supplement the bill of fare, which is apt to become monotonous owing to victual difficulties.” This warning prepared me for a diet of goat’s meat, lean Congo chickens and bananas. I carried tinned provisions and shared my biscuits unwillingly with the rats that scampered over my mosquito net at night.

There are one or two screw-steamers on the Congo, but all the rest are stern-wheelers burning wood-fuel and threshing the water into a muddy

cauldron as they breast the current. The traveller along the Congo never forgets the wood stations – neatly-stacked woodpiles in little clearings hacked out of the forest; the smell of dried fish cooking over log fires; the odour of decaying grass in the swamps. Many a broken man from Europe has ended his life in charge of a Congo wood station.

River steamers, with their shallow draught and high upper works, call for careful handling in the tornadoes that sweep through tropical Africa. To be caught broadside-on may mean a capsized. So the skipper must watch the sky and the force of the wind, turn quickly to the bank and make fast when the whirlwind threatens.

The great central waterway of the Congo is obstructed by thousands of islands and sand-banks. It is impos-

ible to avoid running aground almost every day. Sometimes an error of judgment sends the steamer crashing and tearing into the thick green tangle of bush that overhangs the river-bank; and then insects enough to stock a museum come whirring and biting among the passengers. Ahead, astern, race the engines, stern-wheel threshing violently, as the skipper tries to take her clear of the sand-bank on which she has grounded. Mail-boats on the river have powerful winches, large crews and stout hawsers to deal with such delays. But I have seen a cargo boat which had been aground for a fortnight, and a ship which had gone to her assistance piled up alongside-both waiting miserably for the water to rise and release them.

Lake navigation is similar to ocean voyaging – the officers are deep-water

men and the ships are small ocean steamers. They sight hippos and flamingos instead of whales and seagulls; otherwise they might often forget they are so far from the sea. On the rivers, however, there are peculiar risks which the salt-water sailor does not run.

Outnumbering all the white man's steamers on African waterways are the dug-out canoes chipped patiently by the natives from mammoth tree trunks. I have watched the primitive shipwrights at work along the Congo, using their native adzes and axes with real skill; fashioning a hull that will float 5 tons of cargo, a crew of paddlers and a drummer to encourage them as they swing with savage rhythm down the golden river pathway.

There are Arab dhows, too, on the

great lakes, with decorated prows and sterns like galleons, carrying deck passengers, livestock and freight in competition with the lordly “Chemins de Fer du Grand Lacs Africains.”

Among the inland shipping pioneers of Africa were the missionaries. They were, I believe, first on any African lake with the *Ilala*, fifty years ago – a little pinnacle that remained in service for generations on Nyasa. Today a fleet of fine steamers sails those waters.

Tanganyika, the longest fresh-water lake in the world, is often lashed by tropical gales until it becomes a raging sea. Stout vessels are needed to ride the combers. There again the first ship launched on the lake was the *Good Hope*, owned by the London Missionary Society. Since then British and German armed “cruisers” have fought

for supremacy on the lake, and a handsome fleet of peaceful passenger ships, British and Belgian, have appeared to trade from Ujiji to Albertville. One of the Belgian ships, the *Liemba*, was once the German man-o’-war *Graf Goetzen*. Sunk by shell-fire during the War, she was raised in 1924, repaired and modernised, even to the extent of an ice-plant.

Relics of an ill-fated and forgotten river expedition of seventy years ago were found recently by a British patrol on the banks of the Juba River in Somaliland, 500 miles from the sea. An officer reported that he had seen a rusty little steamer, half-hidden by tropic growths and trees. The funnel was still standing, creepers twined through port-holes, and the whole appearance of the ship suggested tragedy.

Inquiries showed that a German explorer had brought the vessel out to Zanzibar in parts in 1865, assembled it there, and then steamed off to discover the source of the Juba River where no white man had penetrated before. His ship, the *Guelph*, was a paddle-wheeler, 119 feet in length, and with a shallow draught that enabled her to reach the rapids beyond the walled native town of Bardera. There the ship struck and had to be abandoned. The explorers were massacred by a treacherous sheikh, and only a few survivors escaped in an open boat. The *Guelph* remains as they left her, slowly being swallowed by the jungle, a skeleton ship in a distant corner of Africa.

A striking parallel with this dramatic find was the discovery, 600 miles from the mouth of the Niger, of a rusty steam engine and propeller. These

relics once formed part of the *Dayspring*, the exploring vessel that was sent out by the British Government in 1857 to chart the unknown Niger.

Malaria and a mutinous company of Kroo-boys handicapped the explorers led by Captain Grant and Dr. Baikie. Nevertheless, the ship reached Jebba, and was steaming against a strong current between two great rocks when the steering-gear failed. She swung round, struck heavily and foundered. A small party of survivors paddled down the river in canoes and were picked up by the expedition's relief ship *Sunbeam*. Only in 1915 were the *Dayspring's* engines found by a railway foreman.

Far up the Rufiji River in East Africa there lies another battered hull – the shell-scarred German cruiser *Königs-*

berg. Bottled up by a British fleet in 1914, she was located by airmen and destroyed by monitors. The wreck, stripped of guns and everything of value, rests half submerged on a mud bank, the home of tropic birds.

An old Nile steamer, the *Borden*, still in use, was on the river when Gordon was besieged in Khartoum – an old ship even then. Once she was abandoned and taken by the dervishes. Unaware that Lord Kitchener had captured Omdurman, the dervish crew brought the steamer alongside the bank there while Kitchener's soldiers lay in hiding, waiting. A veteran of the campaign recalled that the dervishes gave the helm and engine orders in queer English – Ish-stopper – turish-tern” – on the principle that the English mechanical devil would only work to an English word of command.

The old *Bordein* was speedily captured, and after her career as a gunboat carried many a tourist down the Nile.

A grotesque, romantic craft once found her way – through the enterprise of an engineer named Beaumont – to a deep pool of the Vaal River in South Africa. She was a steam dredger, and ox-wagons brought her to the scene of Beaumont's enterprise, which was nothing less than an attempt to dredge the bed of the river for diamonds. A gala day was proclaimed when, in 1898, the dredger was ready for her rich task. Unfortunately the rocky formation of the river-bed resisted the dredger's grabs. “Beaumont's Folly,” with her masts and cranes, lay rusting on the river for many years before she was broken up. Nevertheless, the legend of diamonds was true, and an

ingenious digger afterwards made a fortune by damming the river and draining the pool where the dredger had failed.

In Abyssinia there is a legend that a vessel more ancient than any other craft in Africa lies hidden in some remote sanctuary. The priests of the Coptic Church declare that the Ark of the Covenant still exists, safe, but too sacred for human eyes to rest upon.

CHAPTER 11

HOT FRONTIERS

ALONG the hot frontiers of South Africa grow the weird succulent plants which botanical gardens and private collectors in Britain and the United States are eager to secure. They are fascinating, these rare and little-known plants of the desert. The lure of discovery is still there; the patient seeker may still find his name Latinised for a new species.

I once made a long motor-trek with my friend Reay Smithers, the South African desert traveller, hunter and botanist, whose shipments of plants to the New York Botanical Gardens have aroused the interest of almost complete novelty. Together we penetrated the unmapped Richtersveld, loneliest corner of the Cape Province. We heard the baboons barking at night

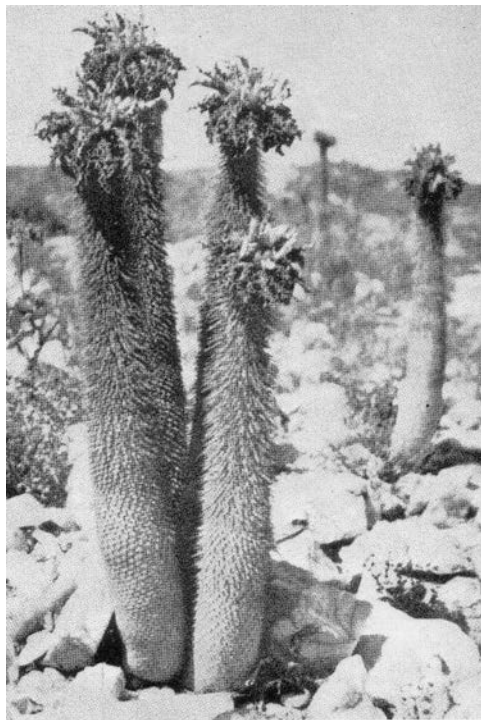
as we lay on our blankets under kopjes where no man, perhaps, had ever slept before. It was an adventure, this search for the leathery mimics of the plant world – the growing things that resemble stones and nuts, the rank-smelling staples, and the larger tree forms such as the “half-men’s.”

One memorable night we camped near the Orange River. It was intensely dark. We ate our biltong (dried meat like pemmican) and made the coffee by the lights of the car; but of the surrounding veld we could see nothing. The rising moon woke me, and then I saw a sight like an army marching over a hill close by, ghostly figures silhouetted against the yellow moon. I touched Ready. He stared, and told me the legend of the “half-men’s” – the strange trees that grow nowhere else in the world but this inaccessible

territory.

“The Hottentots say that a foreign and mysterious people once crossed the Orange River and invaded this land,” declared Ready Smothers. “They died of thirst, and from the bones of each family grew these trees that look so much like humans – with something missing – when you see them like this under the moon. The head of the flower on each trunk points always to the north, as though the lost spirits were striving to return to their homeland.”

The *Pachypodium Namaquanum*, as scientists call the “half-mens,” was discovered a century ago by the explorer Paterson. It was in flower at the time of our journey; and I believe our photographs of the flowers were the first ever taken. People who had lived on the edge of the Richtersveld

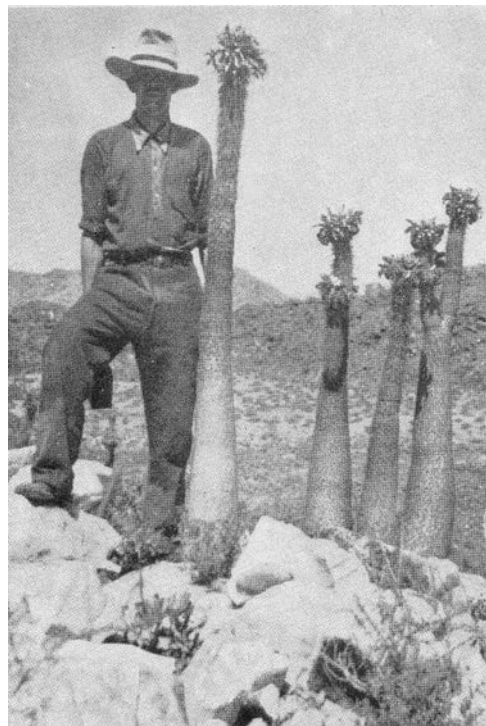


“Half Mens” trees.

for many years told us they had never seen the tree in flower. Rain may not

fall once in five years in that desolate region. The “half-mens,” it is estimated from the rate of growth of seeds, takes hundreds of years to reach its greatest height of 8 feet. The fleshy, branchless trunk – almost the girth of a man in the middle – is covered with fierce thorns and crowned with green leaves. Not until 1911 were specimens seen even in Cape Town; but in that year the late Fred Cornell, a well-known prospector, brought two “half-mens” trees back to civilisation with him.

Often during our trek in this wilderness the only shade for 20 miles from a sun temperature of 140 degrees would be a solitary Kokerboom – the tree from which the Bushmen secured quivers for their poisoned arrows. The Kokerboom grows higher than the “half-mens”



A seven-foot “Half Mens” which may be hundreds of years old.

In the trunk of one, standing beside a

lonely waterhole, we were puzzled to find a number of rotting pegs, evidently driven in years ago. A police officer supplied the explanation. "Relics of the departed Bushmen," he said. "They took that precaution so that if a lion surprised them while they were drinking at the waterhole they could escape up the trunk."

We thought of the Bushmen again when we found a specimen of the rare "Duiker-horings" plant (literally, horns of a buck, Afrikaans). Each section of the plant, as it grows, carries another section on its back as it were, and the Bushmen called it in their language the "Abba" plant because it reminded them of the manner of their women in carrying babies in skin sacks on their backs.

During an exceptionally favourable year, two horns grow out at the end of

the last shoot to a length of 9 inches, widening at the base and changing colour from green to a dappled brown. So like the horns of a buck they are that one invariably raises the gun to the shoulder at the first glance.

"Duiker-horings" is a *Stapelia*, and one variety provided the Bushmen with a liquid which, when mixed with snake venom, was used for their arrows. The poison would paralyse a buck for several minutes; time enough for the Bushman hunter to race forward and make a kill.

Ah, the tragedy of the vanished Bushmen! Only in the deep fastness's of the desert will you find these little bands of primitive folk now. I saw one Bushman, a wizened old fellow, left behind in the retreat from white progress – one last survivor searching for cigarette ends outside a hotel in

Namaqualand. They have gone, leaving – only their caves and their pegs in the Kokerbooms to show us how they once lived.

A Bushman guide would have been invaluable to us in our search for plants that are better able to hide from browsing animals and man than any other plants in the world. Bushmen detected these almost invisible plants by their odours. We had to use our eyes to discover the freak exhibits of the plant kingdom. Succulents are indeed masters of the art of camouflage. It cannot be mere chance that a Lithops is found wrinkled like the limestone where it grows, or a Dinteranthus with amber, angular leaves growing among angular quartz of the same colour. Only in the rainy seasons are they completely revealed by great white flowers and blooms of every

hue. Unseen and unrecorded, many other queer plants await the explorations of botanists in the desert wonderland of the Richtersveld.

Some of these succulents resemble cones or coco-nuts; others are like a tortoise, a snake's head, a spiky pincushion or a little brown egg. You will find leaves with tough, waxy coverings to shed the rain and to prevent loss of moisture during the summer. Many have their leaves packed as tightly as the pages of a calendar; shade means life to these varieties. Fleshy leaves, water storing stems and formidable names seem to be the characteristics of hundreds of types.

The strange variations in species are best seen perhaps in the aloe – there are more than a hundred different kinds, from a huge tree to an incon-

spicuous plant no larger than a pebble. Euphorbias have thorns, deep roots and milky juice. The star-shaped flowers of the stapelias give out a meaty odour which attracts insects. One stapelia variety is called “haas oor”; it resembles the ear of the hare. Then there is Eve’s Needle – an aloe with sharp and narrow leaves. The cotyledon stores food in its ungainly trunk. It is an untidy plant, like the crassulas and mesembryanthemums with their contorted stems.

Spines or hairy felt protect some of the succulents against animals. The tontelboom has a dense hairy covering of lower leaves, used as tinder by old travellers. Some plants possess a scent or fragrant oil which animals dislike.

Self-preservation against long spells of dry and scorching weather is another force that moulds the Karoo plants.

They have their underground reservoirs, and they refuse to spread their foliage in an unfriendly climate. But when the rain does come, all the crouching hidden things of the veld reveal themselves in sheets of glowing colour. Then you see sunsets on the ground, scarlet, gold and mauve covering miles of land that soon becomes again a scorching desert.

2

South Africa, with its airways, railways and motorcars, has not yet said farewell to the romantic covered wagon.

For nearly three centuries the wagon has played dramatic roles in the story of South Africa. Men, women and children still live in wagons – the trekboers who follow a trail that has no end. A wagon that joined the

cavalcade of the Great Trek a hundred years ago is still in daily use on a Natal farm. And old craftsmen are still building wagons.

I found the last of the wheelwrights at his forge in Wellington recently – the place that was once called Wagon-makers' Valley. It was from Wellington that the heavy transport wagons climbed the first great mountain pass into an unknown hinterland, and for generations the wagon trade enriched the town. At King William's Town, too, I have watched men shaping iron-wood wagons for the mealie farmers; wagons for the Cape border districts where during the rains the roads sometimes allow no motor-truck to go through.

Wagons from these yards have penetrated far beyond the present frontiers of South Africa. One of the

strangest treks of all, however, was that of the South African wagon which visited England. A circus proprietor was responsible for the transition, and he carried out the enterprise in fine style by engaging a whole Boer family and their native servants. Father, mother, three sons and two natives, a typical tent wagon and a span of sixteen oxen embarked at Cape Town.

On arrival at Southampton the oxen were placed in quarantine, and a span was ordered from Germany to allow the show to proceed. The bearded farmer and his family, dressed in voortrekker clothes, the whip play, the wagon and its homely load all combined to fascinate London circus audiences. If the South African war had not broken out, the wagon would have toured Europe in triumph.

It is possible that a new cavalcade will

be seen in London one day – a South African mule team harnessed to a buck wagon, galloping past the 'buses and taxi-cabs, driver shouting, whip lashing and cracking over bowler hatted crowds, the wagon thundering through the Marble Arch at its top speed of twenty miles an hour.

That is a scene which may become a reality if the Union Government acts on a suggestion made by Colonel Deneys Reitz, Minister of Agriculture and author of *Commando* and other works. "South African mule teams should be sent overseas for exhibition," he said. "We could take a pride not only in the splendid animals, but also in the magnificent manner in which they are handled by South Africans. It ought to be a splendid novelty in Europe."

Colonel Reitz himself earned his

living, during a period of exile in Madagascar, as a transport rider. It is an occupation in which the Afrikaner has always excelled. Railways today follow the routes where whips cracked and wagon wheels rumbled. Every city, town and village in the Union has its outspan, and most settlements have grown up round the market squares where travellers once lived in their wagons. Beneath the skyscrapers of Johannesburg the wagons still enter the city by night, bringing their cargoes of fruit and vegetables – as marked a contrast as you will find anywhere in the world.

They pay their way, these relics of the adventurous age, but the transport rider no longer makes a fortune. At the time of the diamond rush to Kimberley, when the trek from Port Elizabeth took a month each way,

freight rates were high and each journey paid the cost of the wagon. During those stirring times the world's strongest wagons were built in South Africa. If they slipped off a rough track and capsized on a rocky mountain-side they were hauled back, new oxen were found, the journey was completed.

In those days a heavy transport wagon cost £120, but the price dropped to £75 when machinery cheapened production. The last great boom in the wagon-building industry occurred during the Great War, when military orders kept the yards working feverishly. After the War these wagons were almost given away to the farmers. The motor-truck appeared. Never again will the yards hear the eager cry for transport wagons.

For a wagon does not wear out. As I

have said, a Great Trek wagon is still being used in Natal after a century of work. It is a full-length tent wagon owned by Mr. B. Scheepers of Besters, and it formed part of Piet Retief's company from the Eastern Province. The front fork, upper and under parts of the chassis, the wooden fork connecting the long wagon with the axle and the wheels (except a few spokes) are the original Knysna stinkwood parts. Every year Mr. Scheepers gives this treasured wagon a coat of paint. It has never been to a blacksmith's shop.

A still more ancient wagon, of eighteenth-century vintage, was discovered at French Hoek (where the refugees settled), and used in recent local pageants. The wagon was hauled by goats up the old elephant trail over the French Hoek mountains when the

first road was constructed. I doubt whether an older wagon exists in South Africa. The most famous wagon, perhaps, is that which President Kruger used before and during the South African war. It was taken to England as a trophy and returned by the City of London Corporation many years afterwards as a token of friendship. The relic now occupies a place of honour in the Pretoria Museum – a sturdy, narrow wagon with many drawers and boxes, fit to travel anywhere in Africa.

While the mule wagon provides a dashing spectacle, the ox does the work. Fifteen miles a day with a full load is the normal pace of the ox; but record-breaking journeys, measured in weeks, have been achieved. One driver covered twenty miles a day over a distance of 420 miles. In 1875 the Port

Elizabeth - Bloemfontein journey, which often took two months, was made in twenty-five days.

Sixteen oxen make a good transport wagon team. As soon as it is born a trek-ox is given a name and taught to recognise it. These trek-oxen names originated when the Dutch East India Company's men first harnessed oxen to wagons at the Cape soon after 1652, and they have survived to our own day. Bontman, Geelbek, Blaauwberg, Donker, Witkop, Veldman, Hartbees, Rooiman – you find them in every team answering the silvery call of the driver and nobly straining to the expert flick of giraffe hide. (A skilful native driver has been known to kill a fly on a leader with one well-aimed crack of the whip.) The colour of the animal usually determines the choice of the name.

Dangers of the road took heavy toll of the wagon folk, but the losses of oxen were heavier still. The metal trek-chain attracted lightning during the violent thunderstorms of the high veld, so that a whole span would be killed by one shock. Wild animals preyed on the teams; poisonous grasses, cattle fevers, the once-mysterious tsetse fly, and above all thirst explained the whitening skeletons beside the lonely tracks. These grim fragments litter Southern Africa from the Kunene to Delagoa Bay. Wrecked wagons and their travellers lie in the sand of riverbeds, buried under desert dunes, decaying in tropical bush.

I thought of the hardships of “voortrekker” days when I met the Angola Boers returning from Portuguese territory to their own people in South-West Africa some years ago.

Among them were a few patriarchs – men of splendid character and physique – who had taken part in the northward trek across the Kalahari in the seventies of last century. It was at once a magnificent and tragic effort, an ordeal of thirst and hunger and battles with hostile natives. They had cannons on the wagons, and they needed them. Many graves were left along the desert trail. When the descendants and the aged survivors of this gallant band returned to South African soil I found they had brought with them two of the original, beloved wagons of the Thirstland Trek.

In Bushmanland I was again reminded of the wagon pioneers, for there I encountered the people who still live in wagons. These trek-boers form a type you will find in no other part of South Africa. Across the wide spaces,

like sails on a hot, brown ocean, move the wagons of these restless people. They are restless because their farms are so poor that in rainless seasons they must take their sheep away in quest of grass. In this dry wilderness a man is often compelled to abandon his own drought stricken area of veld for two years at a time. I doubt whether there is a farm in Bushman land large enough to support its sheep when the summer rains do not arrive.

So the trek-boer sets out along the blazing roads with his wife and children in the covered wagon. I remember one family I met on a sand-choked road in a waterless valley of stark, blinding heat to the south of the Orange River. Two little girls playing with the lambs; their mother, wearing a loose print dress and old-fashioned kappie, in the shade of the wagon;

three tired men searching the horizon for signs of moisture. They asked for water. I gave them one of the canvas water-bags that every motorist in Bushman land carries, and a few small melons. Most of their sheep had perished. They were trekking on, still full of hope.

These people knew little of the feverish world beyond the aching mountain ranges that shut in Bushman land. They had their Bible, but no radio set. Their children had been born and brought up under the wagon tents; they had never seen a town. A few of those mixtures known as "old Dutch medicines" and wonderful physique made them independent of doctors. With them bread was a luxury; coffee, boer biscuits and meat their daily fare. I tasted the water they had been drinking; it was so salty that I could

hardly swallow it.

The trek-boers are nomads by compulsion and by instinct. You find their wagons in the most desolate places, a mile or two ahead of the flocks, the men always asking what grazing they may expect further along the road. A hundred disappointments do not break their spirit. The distance is always alluring.

In the good times, when summer thunderstorms fill the pans and the grass rustles high and yellow in the wind, the life is not unhappy. But the winters, when the grass blackens under the merciless sun and then disappears – each winter is an ordeal. Then the trek-boer must dig in shallow depressions where water is sometimes retained by the underlying rock. Cup by cup the muddy water is scooped out-men, women, children, animals

waiting in pitiful anticipation for their share.

At times the trek-boer stakes the lives of all in the wagon on his ability to find the hidden water. A broken wheel, straying animals, a dry water-hole – such things may spell death in the most remote corners of Bushman land. Red dunes of the Kalahari have crept across the river in certain places; and in this hot sand the bodies of horses, and men, too, have been found.

Old prints reveal that the ox-wagons used in South Africa today are of almost the same design as those used in the Netherlands before the Dutch settlement at the Cape. With fifteen of these mediaeval wagons Governor Simon van der Stel made his great exploring journey into the deserts of Namaqualand, seeking the golden city of Vigiti Magna. The first tracks

towards every distant frontier were made by the wheels of roving wagons. Wars could not have been fought without them or towns born.

Mammoth wagons were built to explore the interior. Pietermaritzburg claimed the largest, Dr. Stanger's "Great Briton," in 1846; but some years later Cape town produced a real Ship of the Veld, 23 feet long, 6 feet wide and 6 feet from floor to roof. A particularly fine wagon was built in 1860, on the occasion of the first Royal visit to South Africa. It carried Prince Alfred, later Duke of Edinburgh, for thousands of miles from Cape Town to Natal and back again, the woodwork emblazoned with the Lion and the Unicorn.

At King William's Town a builder showed me a picture of a wagon he had designed for a Bechuanaland chief

and used for State journeys across the Kalahari. It had large water-tanks fitted beneath the floor, and the decorations were gorgeous.

Then there are the "Sea" wagons, houses on wheels fitted up according to the ideas of their owners – farmers who follow the old urge once a year by taking their families to lonely coasts where there are no hotels. Traders in the native territories of the Transkei were once important customers of the wagon yards; now they use motor-cars. The Union Forest Department still orders wagons of the kort krink type, built to turn round in the small lanes of the forest. Orders have been cabled to King William's Town from New York, when an American wanted shooting safari wagons in a hurry; and wagons have been sent as far afield as the Belgian

Congo, Kenya and South-West Africa. Some of the most luxurious wagons have cost as much as a motor-car. Ordinary farm wagons of the well-known “Grahamstown” type, drawn by sixteen oxen and carrying loads up to five tons, are most frequently in demand. There are at least 100,000 wagons in South Africa, most of them built to the “Grahamstown” model. Voortrekker wagons were equipped with wooden axles and remskoens instead of brakes; the wheels being locked with chains and the remskoen being placed beneath the iron tyres to prevent wear. The ring to which the chain was shackled is fitted to every wagon built today. It was not until 1860 that brakes acting on the wheels came into use.

Many farmers rightly insist on the traditional hand painted *blommetjie*

decorations on wheels and sides, the same bunches of flowers that have adorned wagons for more than a hundred years.

As far back as 1816 the Governor of the Cape paid a French Hoek farmer, W. J. Naude, a gratuity of five hundred rix-dollars for the invention of a super-wagon capable of carrying four leaguers of wine with fewer oxen through heavy sand. At that time the roads were nothing more than wagon-tracks. A journey in bad weather from Cape Town to Caledon (now two hours by motor-car) lasted thirteen days. But the volume of traffic was impressive. During the first Witwatersrand gold rush more than sixteen thousand wagons left the railhead at Ladysmith in a year – sixteen thousand wagons loaded with picks and explosives, flour and

blankets and the impatient gold-diggers themselves.

The wagon looks simple, but it has more parts than you might imagine. A strong belly-plank rests on the two great axles with their four strong wheels, the voor wielen being smaller than the hind ones. Securely fastened to the disselboom is the drawing-gear, or trekgoed. Great care is taken in assembling the front carriage; the tongue must be set correctly into the bed of the axle so that the draught is evenly distributed on each wheel. The projecting belly-plank serves as a foot-rest for 'the driver. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of lives have been lost in South Africa through men jumping for this projection and missing it. Even at the crawling pace of the wagon there is then usually no escape. The victim falls among the

oxen and the heavy wheels pass over him. A step has now been added to minimise the danger.

Boughs bent and lashed together made a framework for the painted canvas tent in the early wagons. There were always cupboards front and back, the voor kist and achter kist, for goods, while small boxes on each side held reins, straps and gear for the yokes and oxen.

On trek, the women and children placed their mattresses on the katel, a wooden frame with leather thongs, and slept inside the wagon. The men slept beneath the floor, while the servants camped under the stars, close at hand.

In canvas bags, or *jager zakken*, fastened inside the wagon, were stowed the powder-horns, bullet pouches and the formidable long boer

guns called *roers*. In laager formation, with thorn-bushes packed between the wagons, small bodies of *voortrekkers* defeated the mass attacks of Zulu impis. As the men fired between the wheels the women loaded the long guns. Those were episodes of high courage which South Africa has not forgotten.

Water-*vaatjes* swung from hooks beneath the wagon, with the cooking-pots, gridirons and tar-pot for greasing the axles. Coffee and sausages, biscuits and ash cakes, meat for *carbonaatjes* (grilled chops) – such was the wagon's larder. With this equipment thousands journeyed into the unknown.

William Burchell, the famous scientist and explorer who lived in an ox-wagon in South Africa for four years, carried a more elaborate store. His list

of equipment, drawn up for the guidance of future explorers, included: "Goods as presents to the chiefs and for bartering with the natives, clothing and blankets for own Hottentots, books – fifty volumes, a chest of select medicines, fishhooks and lines." At one dinner party held by Burchell in honour of a Kalahari chief the menu consisted of boiled beef, rice, sheep tail, and salt and tea. The natives added milk in spite of the fact that they had never tasted tea before.

In those days men loved their wagons and the wagon life. The roads were more fascinating, the evening camp-fire gave more satisfaction. The brave story of the covered wagon is the story of South Africa.

CHAPTER 12

FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

THE people of Cape Town, resting out of doors in the hot sunshine on Christmas Day, 1935, saw, in the afternoon, a huge yellow column rising from the lower slopes of Table Mountain.

I watched it from across the bay, and knew that this was not van Hunk and the Devil smoking their pipes furiously, according to Cape Malay legend, to create the famous “table-cloth” of cloud that spreads over the mountain when south-east winds blow. This was fire – fire that is dreaded by all who live in the shadow of the “Old Grey Father.” But few then guessed that the dense mist on the face of Table Mountain was to grow the most disastrous fire Cape Town has ever seen, a fire that caused havoc in the

plantations to the tune of many thousands, and left scars that will not fade for many years.

When I drove towards the city that evening thousands of motor-cars were travelling roads that should have been almost empty. Now the mountain was aflame, the air in city streets filled with the incense of pine-needles, acrid with drifting smoke, ash particles settling wherever the wind carried them and blackening the beaches. An air-mail pilot who flew to Cape Town that night told me he sighted the red glow more than a hundred miles away. Against the dark mountain the flames made a set-piece like a gigantic fireworks’ display; but there was no end to this grim performance until daybreak came. Even then the smoke was streaked with red as blazing trees crashed down the cliffs and fresh



The table mountain fire on Christmas day, 1935.

torches were lit by the dawn wind.

A magnificent spectacle, perhaps, but there was no laughter among the vast audience of white, black and brown humanity on the shores of Table Bay. For Cape Town loves its mountain. The city lies so close beneath the sheer precipice, 3500 feet high, that every main landmark of gorge and ravine, rocky buttresses, cluster of trees or distant pathway can be found without glasses. At his office desk the mountaineer may stare upwards and select one of the two hundred fascinating routes by which men, more or less daring, may reach the summit. General Smuts captured this appeal in his dedication of the War Memorial of the mountaineers: "Table Mountain was their cathedral, where they heard subtler music and saw wider visions and were inspired with a loftier spirit.

Here in life they breathed the great air; here in death their memory will fill the upper spaces."

Fire was an enemy, then, that menaced something more precious than the acres of pine-trees planted by the Government Forestry Department. It meant a call for all hands – all the disciplined men who could be spared. On Christmas Day it was difficult to gather the scattered units of the first line of defence, the rangers and labourers of the department; but many left their dinner-tables and the homes they were not to see again for several days. The call for reinforcements was answered by officers and men of the Special Service Battalion – young soldiers enlisted to check unemployment in South Africa, and sent back to civilian life as soon as jobs are found for them. I watched the battalion and

other Defence Force units marching up the steep roads with their field kitchens, first-aid detachments and water supplies. By this time red-hot boulders were rolling down the mountain, blazing logs were falling from the heights, many injuries required to be dressed.

The trained foresters showed the soldiers how to deal with fire. In places they struggled to clear the ground at the base of cliffs so that the burning, hurtling branches from above would not create new devastation. Rocks, sundered by the heat and falling in fragments, made such work dangerous. Skilful calculations were made, quick decisions taken for “counter-firing,” so that belts of burnt-out timber would await and arrest the main walls of flame when they arrived. Much of this desperate work,

unfortunately, was nullified by the caprice of the winds, now south-east, now north-west. Fire-belts, laid out in proportion to the risk and some of them very wide and lined with high, spark-arresting gums-these fire-belts proved their value in some areas and failed in others.

Bare-backed, sweating, raking and shovelling, the undefeated army of workers on the mountain toiled to save further destruction. At one period the National Botanic Gardens at Kirstenbosch; one of the finest nature reserves south of the Equator, was threatened. Sparks blown from Devil’s Peak actually started a fire on the famous Groote Schuur estate, old home of Cecil Rhodes and now the Prime Minister’s official residence. Then the watchful fire brigades were called to the University of Cape Town, where



Beaches of table bay after the fire.

the engines waited to deal with the creeping devastation. Again and again the wind promised disaster, then brought relief.

Some of the escapes from encircling fires will never be related. Possibly the nearest approach to tragedy was the experience of a Swede and his wife who were eating a picnic lunch on the Saddle, between Table Mountain and Devil's Peak, when they saw the fire below them. It was coming unpleasantly close, and they decided to move higher. They had hardly settled in a new spot when flames and smoke again approached them. Tired and alarmed they clambered up a huge rock in a clearing with the idea of allowing the fire to pass. The fire roared by, close enough to scorch and almost stifle them. They hurried down the mountain, over smoking stretches

of ruin, until they were suddenly trapped again by an unexpected ring of fire. "It was not only on all sides, but also above us," they declared. As the tormented pair ran zigzag to avoid the flames they noticed terrified animals and birds. They were rock rabbits screaming with pain – the little creatures called dassies in South Africa and related to the elephant. Pheasants crouched on the ground and did not move for human feet. Mercifully a gap appeared in the flames and the couple were able to reach a contour path, belongings lost, their bodies black, yet alive and safe.

The fire was a tragedy, indeed, for some of the animals of Table Mountain. At first sight this great mass of rock, clear-cut against the sky, might not appear to shelter much wild life. Yet there are roebuck and grysbok,

one leopard, a famous pack of baboons and innumerable snakes. It is unlikely that the single, wily old leopard perished in the fire. Few people even suspected the presence of this last surviving leopard until two years ago, when it came bounding down a slope where a University professor sat reading. Farmers at Hout Bay reported small losses of poultry and one ram soon afterwards; and a hunting party found the leopard's cave. Remains of food in the den suggested a diet of baboons and rock rabbits, so it was decided that the last of the Table Mountain leopards should be given a further lease of life.

The baboons, too, more than human in their instinct for danger, would not easily be trapped by the flames. They live in caves where the wizened Bushmen once feasted. Table Moun-

tain, as far as the baboons are concerned, has been an "island" for more than a century, the city, suburbs, and railway lines below cutting them off effectively from the rest of their tribe. Protected by the Government, a pack about two hundred strong survives on the mountain. These baboons should not be confused with the famous Cape Point baboons that delight motorists beyond Simonstown. The two tribes fight occasionally, but they do not mix.

The smell of fire must have conveyed an urgent warning to the wise old baboons. Their three-legged leader, "Ou Jan" – a character on the mountain, well known to the rangers – was hit by a farmer's gun some years ago, after an attack on a young girl near Muizenberg. He has reformed, the price once placed on his head has

been removed, and with his followers he shares the sanctuary of Table Mountain. No, "Ou Jan" has met danger too often to be caught, like a careless human, in a mountain fire.

When it was all over I tramped through the charred blackness of the pine plantations. I do not think they will plant pines again on Table Mountain. Half a century ago there were no trees on these slopes that were not there when the first explorers arrived. The late Mr. John X. Merriman, then Prime Minister, conceived the idea of covering the mountain slopes with pines. It was not realised then that the hungry and inflammable pine would drain the ground of its subterranean water supplies and eat up soil covered by indigenous growths. Bulk planting, with the carpet of pine-needles that

resulted, made a great area explosive after a spell of hot weather. Wild flowers suffered. Now the fire has wiped out ledges where the painted ladies grew, where crassula and Afri-kanders, pink moederkappies and protea gaily flourished. In many places the sugar birds will find smooth, hard ground where their favourite bushes once flourished.

Mercifully the silver trees were not seriously affected by the fire. Nowhere else in the world do these gracious and remarkable trees thrive as on Table Mountain, their stronghold and native home. A few, transplanted or grown from seed, have battled for survival at Madeira and in California; these are feeble in comparison with the vigorous acres of silver trees at the Cape. To see them shining as a south-east wind moves the bright leaves is to under-

stand something of the charm, the essence of the Cape. They caught the eye of van Riebeeck when he landed in 1652; and many a famous visitor since then – Thunberg the botanist, Burchell the traveller, Lady Anne Barnard, John Barrow – climbed the mountain and praised the silver trees. Not even the oaks of the Government Avenue, planted early in the eighteenth century to shelter the Dutch East India Company's garden, are so typical of Cape Town, so long remembered.

After the fire, of course, came the search for the cause – an inquiry in which every citizen of Cape Town felt qualified to take part, with many ingenious suggestions as the result. There is a common belief that fires on the mountain are most often started by the rays of the sun being focused on

inflammable material through scraps of broken glass. The belief is not shared by the Conservator of Forests. His staff carried out a series of experiments in the plantations with a number of broken glass fragments to discover the powers of magnification on different types of forest and bush litter. Only when glass lenses were used were the experts successful in producing fires.

“Natural” causes, declare the officials, are at most responsible for a negligible number of fires. They do not even believe that fires started by accident are numerous. Fires, they say, are deliberately started.

Suspicion falls on coloured wood collectors. After a fire these people are allowed to gather partly-burnt wood free, so that the damaged areas may be cleared. When firewood is scarce there

is the temptation to start a fresh blaze. This has been done in the past by placing short pieces of candle in a pile of dry leaves and twigs. By the time the candles have reached the leaves they have escaped.

Colonel Deneys Reitz, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, and better known, perhaps, as the author of that great Boer War narrative, *Commando*, is the man who will have to decide the future clothing of Table Mountain. He declared that most of the fires were started by sellers of wild flowers. The flower-sellers, he said, held that unless the mountain slopes were burnt the flowers would not germinate. Steps are being taken to introduce a law prohibiting the sale of wild flowers. It was recalled that a century ago a party of reckless climbers amused themselves by rolling rocks over a

precipice on the face of the mountain. These rocks, colliding violently with the rocks below, threw out sparks that set fire to the brush-wood and would have created havoc but for a providential shower of rain. Whether the great fire of 1935 was started by careless coffee makers, a chance cigarette end, or by people who had something to gain will probably never be known. One certain result, however, will be the proclamation of Table Mountain as a national park. At present the mountain is shared by private owners, the Cape Town Municipality and the Government. State protection of the whole mountain will give some added security in the matter of fires.

For years to come the traveller arriving in Cape Town will stare at areas on the face of the mountain as

gaunt as Gibraltar. Probably the beautifying of these bare spaces will be left to Nature. The work of decades has gone up in flames, and it is unlikely that more pines and gums will be planted as fuel for a future blaze. Colonel Reitz has announced that he has an open mind on the problem; experiments would be carried out to see whether a type of timber not so liable to fire would grow on Table Mountain.

Well, the smoke has cleared and another page in the story of Table Mountain has been written. As I stare at the grey face, not so greatly changed after all; I see again the cavalcades of climbers who found adventure there. Saldanha, the Portuguese navigator, struggling upwards four centuries ago, and no doubt regretting the armour and the

weapons he carried. Lady Anne Barnard, too, refreshing herself on the summit from “two boxes of cold meats and bottles of port, Madeira and Cape,” carried up by slaves.

When John Barrow reached the top of the “grand and awful” chasm of Platteklip Gorge, in 1806, he discovered an anchor of ancient pattern buried amid sand and rocks. The metal, though heavily corroded, weighed 150 lb. A mysterious relic, indeed, to find so far above the sea. It was said that Bartholomew Diaz had hidden it there in case he should need an anchor when he called again.

“A great and singular feat,” they called it when, in 1798, Sir James Craig’s aide-de-camp rode up Table Mountain on horseback. About twenty years later the ride was repeated by Dr. Cathcart of the 28th Regiment. A baby

motor-car reached the summit not long ago, but this was not so much a feat of courage as an ordeal of strength – the car was pushed over difficult parts of the route.

Swarms of locusts and acres of snow, waterfalls after heavy rain, tremendous falls of rock, like earthquakes, a gold rush – all these Table Mountain has watched. The greatest danger to human life is not fire, but the sinister veil of the “table-cloth.” Every year the news of a mountain tragedy rings through Cape Town like a funeral bell – the news that some lone climber has lost his way in the mist and fallen to death.

Men have vanished for ever on this mountain. Often weeks pass before the body of a lost climber is found. I remember an old ranger telling me of the vagrants of Table Mountain, men

who have made their homes in the bush, living like half-wild creatures. Some time ago a skeleton was found at the bottom of a gorge. No one could identify it. Then the ranger recognised a small knapsack he had seen carried by a queer character, a coloured man who had roamed the mountain for years.

Another skeleton was identified, three years after a man had disappeared, by a dentist’s records of the teeth. Heat, exhaustion and snakes have all taken toll of climbers. Yet these are merely grim chapters in the fascinating story of the mountain that has not changed much since van Riebeeck made the ascent and wrote: “Upon the top of this promontory Nature hath, as it were, found herself a delightful bower, here to sit and contemplate the great sea which from the south, east and

west beat upon this shore, and therefore, hath here formed a great plain, pleasant in situation, which with the fragrant herbes, variety of flowers and flourishing verdure of all things, seems a terrestrial paradise. It is called the table of the Cape.”

Visions fade. The fire is over, though the ground is still warm underfoot as I come away from the first survey of the scarred face of Table Mountain. At the edge of a vanished plantation I read an official notice that sums up the disaster better than any of the speeches, the vivid newspaper stories of the fire, the vain regrets. The notice, placed there long ago, says: “There are no assets in ashes, no dividends in debris. Help to guard the forests.”

CHAPTER 13

ISLANDS OFFSHORE

UNROLL, the South Atlantic chart and you will find the lonely isles where chance has led me. Here is the Tristan da Cunha group, where on two occasions, at intervals of years, the canvas boats of the islanders have carried me through the surf to the beach of black volcanic sand.

When the grey shape of a man-o'-war comes to anchor off Tristan da Cunha it is a sight which makes island history, and fills the whole population of one hundred and eighty souls with happy excitement. They know that cruisers always bring the largest cargoes, the simple things of life for which they craved – tea, sugar and coffee for their empty pantries.

The people of Tristan are no strangers

to hardship. Business was bad on Tristan even before the present century began. The old folk of the island sigh for the days of the American whalers and the Australia-bound sailing ships, which called there, a ship or two every week, to barter clothes and groceries for fresh meat and vegetables.

Naval surgeons have been keenly interested in the marvellous good health of the islanders. The diseases of civilisation are unknown there. Centenarians are common in the records of the island. Mild epidemics of colds after ships have called and a little rheumatism due to the damp winter climate – these are the only ills. Perfect teeth are the rule.

These islanders form an absorbing study for the scientist who notes the influence of surroundings and circumstances on human beings. Their faces

range from pure Nordic fairness to a negroid brown. Most of them have jet-black hair. All talk a dialect of English which you will not hear on land or sea elsewhere – a heavy drawling dialect containing many sea phrases inherited from their roving ancestors. I believe it is a survival of the English seaman's language at the time of Trafalgar.

All men are equal on Tristan. In the past they were ruled by patriarchs; today they are a leaderless legion. They share the parcels that kindly people send them from the world outside. When cattle are killed there is meat for everyone. Potatoes, which take the place of bread, when the last flour has gone, are cultivated in patches without individual owners.

They are descendants of British soldiers and naval seamen, women of St. Helena (who are a mixture of many

racés, including negro and Chinese), American, Dutch, Italian and Danish shipwrecked sailors. Yet they are all one type today, in spite of colour. Their faces are solemn, almost melancholy; the faces of all who have lived long in isolation under the shadow of a mountain. Most of the men seem poorly developed, scraggy, at first glance; but the visitor who climbs the great peak of Tristan, nearly 8000 feet high, will be left far behind by his sure-footed island guides. In-breeding has caused no degeneration yet among the Tristan folk.

The people of Tristan da Cunha live on, relics of another century. I see them now on the screen of memory. Men in rough sailor clothes, women with handkerchiefs round their heads, wearing the long and flowing dresses of the Victorian fashion. People of an

Isle of Yesterday, “the world forgotten, by the world forgot.”

Nightingale Island, 20 miles from Tristan, has been explored by officers from only three ships in the past sixty years – H.M.S. Challenger in 1873, H.M.S. Odin in 1904 and the *Quest* in 1922. The Tristan islanders seldom go there, as the water is stagnant with vegetable matter and almost undrinkable.

A rocky shelf affords good landing, and a damp cave gives some shelter. The whole island, a mile long and less than a mile wide, is a jungle of tussock grass 9 feet high, with bog and the burrows of the sea-birds underfoot. There are no paths through this treacherous maze, and progress everywhere is difficult. From August to November, the penguin-breeding season, it is impossible to walk beyond the landing

– the fearless birds cover almost every inch of the island.

Inaccessible, about four-hours’ sail in an island boat from Tristan, was the scene of a famous shipwreck early last century. There the ship’s company and passengers of the *Blenden Hall* – fifty-two survivors, including several women – lived wretchedly on penguins and eggs for three months, until they were taken off by the Tristan boats.

Some years later two German brothers named Stoltenhoff voluntarily marooned themselves on Inaccessible, built a small hut, and set up as sealers. Their boat and most of their stores were lost by accident, however, and the Stoltenhoffs lived almost as castaways for two years. The *Challenger* took them back to Cape Town.

Inaccessible is noteworthy as the only known haunt of a strange bird called the “Island Cock” – a small black, almost wingless bird with red eyes which lives in a burrow. The *Quest* expedition tried to find a specimen for the British Museum of Natural History, which did not possess one – but in vain. A specimen was later obtained by the late Reverend H. M. Rogers and was named, Atlantis Rogersi.

The Island Cock is a swift runner. Presumably it can swim, but it does not visit the other islands of the group. The burrow has three entrances, so that even when cornered there it often manages to escape. There is not much fear of the interesting Island Cock becoming extinct, for it is seldom disturbed, and even then usually outwits its pursuers. Even its eggs

cannot be found – the Tristan islanders say that they have never seen one.

There must be other rare and interesting creatures on these islands. But the veil of mystery hangs heavily over them. Few islands in the world are more remote.

Gough Island is out of reach of the Tristan islanders, for it lies 230 miles to the south. I heard the place described, however, by a Tristan islander named Robert Glass, who had been there on several occasions, in the days of the American whalers, when he often joined the “spouters” at Tristan as pilot for short cruises. Ruins of huts and other signs of past occupation have puzzled scientific expeditions visiting Gough Island, but there is really no mystery about them. Some of the huts were built by sealing crews many years ago; and a party of

men from Cape Town, who spent some months there searching for diamonds, left their pans, picks, shovels, axes and other gear to rust in the pretty glen near the landing-place. No diamonds were found.

Discovered by the Portuguese, several centuries ago, Gough Island is now a British possession. It is less grim than barren Tristan – the island peak rises above 4000 feet and is clothed in green, streaked with silver cascades pouring over the steep cliffs. Tussock grass, ferns and moss flourish on all sides.

Fur seals and sea-elephants used to be found on the beaches; probably they have found sanctuary on Gough Island again since the sealers gave up their hunting in these waters. The chief interest of the island is to the ornithologist, for rare birds found

nowhere else in the world make their home there. Finches, orange and green, are to be seen among the blackthorn trees, while water hens, gorgeously coloured, are found in the dense undergrowth. Many varieties of sea-bird, from the stately albatross to the penguin, may be studied on the beaches. Landing is always difficult, however, and it was not until 1903 that the staff of an exploration vessel, the *Scotia*, surveyed Gough Island. Before that time the place was known only to a few sealing and whaling crews. A Robinson Crusoe might have existed there for years without hope of rescue, and a shipwrecked company would be in the same desperate position today.

2

Ever since the Suez Canal was opened, and St. Helena ceased to be a port of call for many ships, the St. Helena

islanders have been poverty-stricken. Nevertheless, there are signs of improvement. Dozens of motor-cars are now running about the scene of Napoleon's exile, over excellent roads built with a grant of £3,00 from the British Government.

A large number of men are earning 1s. 6d. or 2s. a day in the flax industry, while women are paid 9d. a day. These wages may not seem high, but as a matter of fact the owners are keeping the flax mills open purely to benefit the islanders. St. Helena ought to support its population, which is less than 4000 at the present time. A British agricultural expert from Kew Gardens has been trying to restore the cultivation of the old East India Company days, when all sorts of fruits and crops were grown. There are fine pasture lands for cattle. Bee culture

has been successfully introduced.

The fishing, too, is excellent, but here the drawback is that the boats are getting old. During the period when the American whalers called at St. Helena boats were easily obtainable. Now the fishermen cannot buy new boats. It is interesting to note that lack of shipping has resulted in the fish shoals leaving the shores of the island. Ships at anchor off Jamestown used to attract fish owing to the scraps thrown overboard. Now the fishermen need a motor-boat to reach the spot, twenty miles off shore, where albacore are caught.

A Publicity Association has been formed with the idea of attracting visitors, and people with small private incomes to St. Helena. For St. Helena really has much to offer people who do not mind solitude. The cost of

living comfortably is extremely low. Fine old country houses may be hired furnished for £5 a month. Good servants are plentiful at from 15s. a month upwards with board. The St. Helena people are attractive folk, with good manners, well-behaved and law-abiding. Servant girls from St. Helena who have emigrated to South Africa have a very good name.

Unfortunately there seems no hope of solving the problem of St. Helena by emigration. The islanders are not allowed to enter South Africa now unless they have a contract for two years' work and £10 in cash; and employers will not commit themselves to this extent. So the people of St. Helena are forced to cling to their lonely home. When the children have passed out of school there is practically nothing for them to do.

Men are glad to work in gardens or stables at half a crown a day. Anyone who decides to settle on the island would be able to keep a horse and carriage for about £90 a year. Meat costs is a pound; it is too expensive at that price for most of the islanders, who live mainly on fish, rice and vegetables. Customs duties are very low, and taxation, compared with other parts of the world, is almost negligible. There is no income tax.

Other advantages of life on St. Helena are the healthy climate, possibilities of indulging in such hobbies as gardening and fruit-growing, golf, tennis, cricket, pheasant and partridge shooting, sea-fishing and riding. There is no reason why St. Helena should not become a flourishing holiday resort of the future. Apart from the motor-cars, St. Helena has not changed greatly with the years

– life there is very much like life in the English country-side long ago.

Ascension Island has seldom appeared in the day's news since the Royal Navy departed and the volcanic outpost ceased to appear in the Navy List as H.M.S. *Ascension*. There is little to remind us of this desolate lava field which Charles Darwin described as a “land not lying before me smiling in beauty, but staring in all its naked hideousness.”

Georgetown, the settlement, is known to its present inhabitants, the cable men and their wives, as “Garrison.” There you will find the old marines’ barracks – built like the rest of the old “ship” to last as long as the British Empire. Once the island was the sanatorium of the South Atlantic. Healthy trade winds sweep over it constantly; and the crews of tired West

African gunboats found refreshment there for many years.

First occupied three centuries after the Portuguese discovered it, Ascension became a British naval base when Napoleon went into exile on St. Helena. Roads were hacked out of the lava to link the settlement with the farm and gardens on Green Mountain. Solid buildings arose amidst a scene which depressed the commander of an American ship so much that he called it “Hell with the fire put out.” Batteries, forts, water tanks, mountain tunnels and walled turtle ponds all remain as monuments to the toil of the marines in spite of great natural obstacles.

Dust and black lava, craters and scorpions are the main impressions of the visitor in “Garrison.” But Green Mountain, rising for nearly 3000 feet

above the settlement, provides a happy contrast. The farm near the summit is a favourite week-end resort for those whose nerves have become frayed by life in the rainless, flowerless, little town below. An English farm-bailiff lives up there, supplying the cable staff with sweet potatoes, mountain lamb, fruit and green vegetables.

A 6-miles' trek it is by mule-cart or on horseback; but the climb through the banana trees, the bamboo and cool ferns of the mountain slopes is well worth while. Here is a new country, a rich tropical oasis, the clean scent of water after the parched wilderness, with a marvellous dew-pond to be discovered on the mist-laden summit. Water has a special appeal on an island where the rainfall is so uncertain that sun condensers have been erected as a last resort. Mountain

House and Garden Cottage are glimpses of England.

The birds of Ascension have rightly found their way on to the new postage-stamps. They are tropical swallows or "wide-awakes"; and their breeding ground on the plateau, called "Wide-awake Fair," is one of the sights of the island. Their eggs are like those of the plover, and very good to eat – thousands are taken during the irregular season. The huge man-o'-war bird, 7 feet from wing to wing, may be seen along the coasts. Gannets, too, visit the island and the guano is exported.

It was the naval custom to send a gift of turtle from Ascension to the Lords of the Admiralty in London every year. Shipments have not been so regular, however, since the Navy abandoned the island in 1922 and handed over the administration to the

cable company.

The turtle season opens on January 1 each year and closes four months later. No rifle-firing is allowed during that period, for the turtles are precious and must not be scared away. The turtle hunters set out at night for the beaches, where the female turtles haul out of the sea to lay their eggs. Solemnly each female proceeds for some distance above high-water mark, digs with her flippers a large pit in the sand, lays fifty or more eggs, covers them carefully and departs. The sun does the hatching. On the way back to the sea, however, the hunters intervene and turn the turtles over on their backs, rendering them helpless. Carts then carry the rich, living cargo to the tanks to await shipment.

When the young turtles have incubated in the warm sand nine or ten weeks

later, they break through to the surface and hurry to the sea. There are many casualties, however, during this short journey – man-o'-war birds swoop down from the sky and pick up the little ones.

With the sea, the birds and the mountain garden to draw upon, wonderful menus are possible on Ascension. Anyone can have oysters for dinner, followed by turtle soup, roasted crab, crayfish, cavalli or delicate flying fish, eggs, partridge, pheasant, rabbit and a fruit salad containing oranges, Indian gooseberries and pineapple – all produce of the island.

Ascension, indeed, is not an empty desolation, in spite of first appearances, and life in the settlement need not be monotonous. Wherever English men gather a club is started, and the

club above the post office, with its bar and billiard tables, is a cheerful place. Gramophone dances are held on the veranda. The ships, one from England and one from South Africa each month, bring mail – and casks of beer. Clothes do not matter; the men wear khaki shirts and shorts. There are tennis courts and a golf course, though cricket and football have languished with the dwindling of the population. Fishing demands no patience at all – a hook baited with red rag is seized immediately. “Krooboy,” or black-fish, perform the useful service of eating the weeds on the hulls of ships at anchor. Silver fish, rock cod and conger eel are plentiful, and those who desire more vigorous sport catch sharks and dolphins. (You swim in a protected bath if you are wise at Ascension.)

Ships anchor in Clarence Bay, where there is a stone jetty. Cable men and their wives have sometimes had to leave without their baggage when rollers made it impossible for loaded boats to leave the shore. These rollers come suddenly in the shape of a heavy swell and crash violently against the island. Their cause is still uncertain, though distant gales of wind have been held responsible. Arriving on perfectly calm days, the fury of the rollers at their worst is alarming; even the well-built houses shake, while the sea sweeps in foam far above high-water mark. Vessels at anchor, however, are not disturbed, for the rollers break close inshore. These huge ocean ripples are observed on the other South Atlantic islands as well, but nothing quite like them can be seen elsewhere.

Such is the home of the exiles of Ascension – not an island paradise, perhaps, but at least free from taxation, disease, and the worries of city life.

4

Count the islands owned by the Union of South Africa. How many do you know? The old school atlas does not, even by nameless black specks, suggest the presence of dozens of odd little outposts. Only the charts tell the whole story.

The coasts of the Union stretch for 2000 miles from the Kunene to Kosi Bay, and they are dotted, especially in the west, with queerly-named islands. A surprising chain of islands indeed, nearly fifty of them all told.

Most northerly of all is an island which cannot be counted – the mud

island which comes up steaming hot in Walvis Bay at intervals of years, only to vanish after a few days. First on the list, then, are two bird islets in Sandwich Harbour, that old resort of pirates to the south of Walvis. Follow the coast south and you reach Hollam's Bird Island, a mass of basalt and lava, where seal pelts worth hundreds of thousands of pounds have been won. German poachers often raided this island in the past; a lonely place on a fog-bound coast.

Then Mercury Island, hollowed out by the seas of centuries, shaking like quicksilver every time a sea rushes into the great cavern in its face. One day, they say, Mercury Island will collapse into the ocean. Ichaboe Island next, another kingdom of the birds-pronounced "Itchaboo," just like a sneeze. Smallest of these isles, it

carries the richest crop of guano. An isle of strange legends with a blood-stained story.

Possession Island, not far away, favourite resort of the penguin millions, was once the scene of a drama of thirst. The water ran so low in the tanks that one man of the guano gang paddled across to the mainland and set out along the desert shore to Luderitzbucht to fetch help. They found him dead on a sand-dune outside the town; but they guessed his mission and sent water to the island in time. Sun condensers were installed after that tragedy. Near Luderitzbucht, too, are the rocky islets where the dangerous trade of sealing is carried on when sealskins are in demand. Dumfudgeon, Staple Rock, Staple Reef, Eighty Four, all haunted by the ghosts of drowned seamen.

Three islands shelter the harbour of Luderitzbucht – Seal, Penguin and Shark-islands which. have been searched again and again for the treasure of Captain Kidd. Shark Island, once a prison camp for the Hereros and Hottentots who rebelled against German rule, is now the site of a hospital.

Halifax Island, within walking distance of Luderitzbucht, is a favourite station for the guano men, for there the headman may have his wife and family with him. On the coast opposite the island Bartholomew Diaz left the stone cross which drunken whaler men cast down centuries later. North and South Long Islands are inhabited only by seals, but Pomona is carefully guarded. It lies close to the richest diamond area on the coast, and diamonds have been found on the

island itself.

Sinclair Island (there are really two islands with one name) was called Roast Beef Island until Captain Sinclair landed there and gave it his own name. The companion isle of Plumpudding has remained unaltered by any personal whim.

Now we are approaching the mouth of the Orange River and have left the last of the South-West isles astern. Already we have sighted twenty islands, desolate pinpricks on the chart, waterless; but each with its own wealth. Old charts showed a small group called the Socos Islands hereabouts; but when the Dutch East India vessels searched for them, they discovered only a patch of rocks now marked as the Soco reefs. The coast at Port Nolloth, however, has its Owen Island, named after the navigator. I

should like to know the origin of Black Jacob Rock which lies in the harbour. Robbe Islet, which gives some protection to the port, is not so mysterious. But what a man Black Jacob must have been!

Southwards again to Morrell Island (or Elephant Rock) where many bands of sealers have marooned themselves for weeks at a stretch. Morrell Island can be approached only in calm weather. Stores and fresh water must be brought through a rocky channel where the current runs perilously. A glaring white island, 40 feet high, rises out of the sea almost within wading distance of the fishing village of Lambert's Bay. This is Penguin Islet, formerly a stronghold of penguins. The colony was suddenly invaded one day by an overwhelming army of malgas (gannets) and the penguins

were driven into the sea.

Seal and Egg Island are really large rocks in a rocky archipelago off Great Paternoster Point. I saw them during a yachting cruise to the Berg River, and thought of the fine ships lost in those waters. Now they are building a lighthouse, and the rocks will be cheated of many victims.

The Saldanha Bay islands form a romantic group, each with its own story of old adventure. Jutten, Marcus and Malagas lie in the fairway. I have seen a handful of silver coins, ducatoons bearing the head of Philip IV of Spain, found in a pool on the beach at Jutten – relics of the wrecked Dutch ship *Meresteyn*. Malagas Island receives few visitors, for lives have been lost in attempts to reach the surf-beaten landing-stage. It is a gannet sanctuary, one mile long, almost every

inch covered by birds in the breeding season. Well within the marvellous harbour of Saldanha, at the lagoon entrance, are Meeuw and Schapen Islands. It was on Meeuw Island nearly a century ago that a secret spring of fresh water was discovered. The fountain had been sealed up with masonry and cement; possibly a trick of the early French sealers who left thousands of skins on the island for van Riebeeck's men to carry away. Vondeling Island lies close inshore to the south of Saldanha. Dassen, the next on our course, is the best known of all the South African guano islands, for the monthly tugs have taken thousands to see the penguins.

Then Robben Island, with its memories of the leper settlement, the convicts, the lunatics and other wretched exiles sent there as a

punishment when Cape Town was very young. Along the shores of Table Bay are two other islets which few people know – Robbenstein Islet, where the seals haul up to sun themselves, and Bird Islet off Blaauwberg Strand, on which the duikers build their nests. “The chart, too, shows a Duiker Island near Hout Bay, though this is merely a large rock.

Seal Island, in False Bay, is a penguin island, and men have lived there, collecting the eggs. An attempt to thin out the seal colony there was made some years ago, for the voracious seals were spoiling the fishing in the bay. The party of rifle-men who set out to attack the island, however, were driven back by seasickness.

Steering eastwards from False Bay we find Dyer’s and Geyser Islands near

Danger Point. The islands and the rocks between them form a natural breakwater, offering shelter in heavy weather – a welcome anchorage on a coast where good harbours are rare. Geyser Island, no doubt, received its name from a jet of water forced up through a hollow rock. Dyer is a mysterious personage. I suspect the original spelling marked the island as one of the discoveries of a much greater man, Diaz. Another Seal Island, the fourth on this voyage, attracts many visitors, for it lies in Mossel Bay and is easily accessible by tug.

There are no more islands until we reach Algoa Bay, where we find St. Croix Island off the Coega River, and the historic group includes St. Croix, Bird, yet another Seal and Stag Islet. It was on St. Croix that Diaz landed and

raised his cross. When the penguin-egg supplies from Dassen Island fail St. Croix is the only spot in Union waters to make up the deficiency.

There is a False Islet farther along the coast – a dark headland which resembles an island from seaward, but is really part of the mainland. Not until Durban is reached do we find another real island; the Salisbury Island quarantine station and resort of yachtsmen in Durban Bay. And that is the last of the Union's islands.

There are more of them, perhaps, than you suspected. Twenty we counted on the South-West African coast. Now we have glimpsed twenty-six more. So there are forty-six South African islands, queer unknown outposts indeed.

CHAPTER 14

THE LION HUNTERS

ALONG the secret ambitions of most men is the desire to shoot a lion. It always seemed to me a simple affair, provided one could find the time and travel into lion country. Sitting at home the danger of lion shooting hardly enters one's thoughts.

But when you are out in the bush, towards sundown, with a loaded rifle in your hands and no companions in sight, a queer, lone feeling assails the novice. It is then that you realise that lion-hunting may develop into a duel between man and beast. Of course, you can let the lion go, and the chances are a hundred to one against an unprovoked attack. If you fire and wound that lion you are in deadly peril until you have stopped the rush.

Could I be sure of hitting a maddened lion as it came bounding towards me with tail swinging like an angry cat? I often wondered. The thought occurred to me, too, whether I should have the nerve to fire at all.

As I drove across the Kalahari towards Lake Ngami, one evening with an expedition, we came into a clearing and saw seven lions against the background of forest. I wrenched my rifle out of the piled equipment at the back of the car and sent wild shots into that magnificent pride. Others fired. Every-one missed, and the lions bolted like frightened rabbits. I was glad to have had the experience, though I still do not know whether I would have hit a lion coming towards me. The evidence appears to be in favour of the lion.

Lions are shot within 500 miles of Cape Town. In many parts of Africa



Lions which were shot in the main street at Broken Hill, Northern Rhodesia.

they are breeding so rapidly, and becoming so dangerous, that several governments have classed lions as “vermin” and are paying rewards to hunters for every tail they produce.

Tshekedi, the Bechuana chief, recently drew attention to a ghastly custom that still survives among the Bushmen of his territory, part of the Kalahari desert. There, within 1000 miles of Cape Town, Bushmen parents threw their children to lions as peace-offerings. This was done when lions became troublesome and roared round the camps at night.

In Northern Rhodesia, not long ago, the baby daughter of two white residents was carried out of the tent by a lioness one night. The father seized his rifle, and, followed by natives with spears, tracked and cornered the lioness in the forest. One shot killed

the lioness, and the baby was restored unhurt to the frantic mother.

Hugh Hall, a well-known elephant control officer in the same territory, was not so fortunate. His rifle misfired while he was out on duty last year; and, although he wounded the lion severely with one shot, he failed to kill it instantly. Hall was still alive, pinned down by the dead lion, when help reached him. He died on the way to hospital – one more victim of the hunter’s horror, a defective cartridge.

The record for swift lion-killing in South Africa is claimed by Mr. Donald Bain, the Kalahari hunter. “I found fifteen lions round a buffalo carcass one sunrise,” he told me. “My first shot killed two, and the rest bolted. Three more fell before the lions were out of range. I estimate that I shot those five lions within six seconds.”

One of the most famous of all African lion-hunters, “Yank” Allen, tired of counting his bag at two hundred and fifty, but went on shooting. It is certain that he shot more than three hundred with his favourite Service rifle; and then it was pneumonia that got him – not a lion.

“Yank” was a lonely man. He would wander into one of the bars along the Limpopo with a wad of notes, each five-pound note representing a lion he had shot, and call a round for the whole crowd in the bar. “What’s yer pison?” he would ask. “If yer don’t want to drink with me mebbe you’ll fight with me.” They always chose to drink.

Lion-hunters sometimes possess a peculiar sense of humour. One Kalahari guide used to take his novices among the desert dunes and

proceed like this:

“Now there’s your lion, behind the bush. Shoot that one.”

Crack!

“That’s right. Now turn round and shoot the one behind you!”

Wonderful fellows these lion-hunters. One day, in Cape Town, there was a growling and a snarling outside my office door, a clinking of chains and scratching of padded feet.

Then the door opened and “Kalahari” McDonald came in – a tough old adventurer of the desert whose life is one long chapter of hazard and escape. He had brought two lion cubs with him.

Small bundles of brown fluff they were, but they had the strength of dogs. Sometimes they rolled on their

backs, playing like kittens. I wanted to stroke them. “Look out!” warned McDonald. “They bite!” While the cubs called to each other in the dangerous language of the desert McDonald told me their story. “I was out in my old hunting ground, motoring along the dried-up Nossob River, when I saw the whole family,” he said. “Now a lion and lioness with cubs mean risky business – even for a professional hunter trying to earn a living in these hard times. I would rather face a hungry lion. I kept the engine of the car running, fixed my sights, and got the lioness. The lion came for me. Two shots went home, but in the wrong spot. They stopped him for a moment, though, and he crouched there glaring at me and swinging his tail like an angry cat. That was my chance. I gave him the

deadly frontal shot between the eyes – my favourite shot. You don’t always get a chance like that. Sometimes, when a lion comes springing towards you, the only thing to do is to aim for the larger target presented by the hind quarters, and cripple him. Then you have time to finish the job.

“But I got this one – I am all right till next time.

“And there were the cubs, only a few days old, and ready to lick the hand which had killed their parents. I took them back to my home in Upington and gave them milk in feeding-bottles. They are two months old now and thriving on it.

“One day, if I keep them too long, they will have their revenge. Of course, I shall sell them. If I am lucky a zoo will pay me £100 for them. If

not, I'll have to take £10 from some woman who fancies them as novel pets. But they will have to go to a zoo in the end."

"Kalahari" McDonald shoots dozens of lions every year, sending the skins to the markets of Europe. If you wish to shoot a lion he will take you out into the desert, stand behind you with rifle ready, and save your life if you miss.

"No good shooting the mangy ones – and you want a good rifle," he says solemnly. "Some tell of charging elephants, of buffalo and rhino; but I would rather face any of them than a wounded lion."

He took a party of amateur hunters into the desert some time ago and allowed them to go off in a motor-car without him one afternoon. "A pretty

tale they told when they came in at sundown, shouting for whisky," grumbled McDonald. "They shot at a lion from the car and wounded it. The lion came jumping towards them, and no one had the nerve to fire again. They simply motored away at top speed. But before they got the car moving fast the lion sprang on to the spare tyre at the back and clung to it. There it was, roaring and biting the car and hood.

"A fine sight it must have been – the open car flying across the desert, four men in the front seat trying to shake off a wounded lion. A scene for a comic film all right. Well, the lion fell off at last and sat down in the road, puzzled. Then they slowed up and shot it; but they kept the engine running, just in case of accidents. "Aye, it's not a game for a nervous man – taking

folks lion-hunting when they've never shot anything larger than a partridge before. They have every chance of scoring a hit, for the lion is standing still when they fire. But I have to cover them. I am the man who fires at a furious moving target.

"Well, I have not missed yet. So long, old man." He dragged his growling cubs out of the office, leaving a breath of the desert behind him – a breath of the Kalahari where men still live dangerously.

2

Then there was Theo de Klerck, a young amateur hunter who spent weeks in East Africa with the Afrikaans author, A. A. Pienaar (who wrote *Adventures of a Lion Family*), trying to get a lion. They failed. When his next holiday came de Klerck set

off into the unexplored Okavango swamps in Bechuanaland.

A strange sequence of events gave me my chance," he told me on his return to Cape Town. "We reached a spot called Sirondekkas on the edge of the swamps, and met Mrs. Engelbrecht, whose husband was killed by his fifty-fifth lion not long ago. Mrs. Engelbrecht carries on the business of cattle trading at this lonely spot. The night after we left a lion raided the place, pulled down a string of biltong hanging over the beds we had occupied and killed a goat. Mrs. Engelbrecht heard the noise, went out with a candle and a rifle and saw the lion eating the goat almost at her feet. She fired and killed the lion.

"Turning round, Mrs. Engelbrecht saw another lion and fired again, wounding it in the foot. Next day there was a

spoor of blood leading away from the house into thick bush. Soon afterwards my companion Millard and I returned and decided to follow the spoor.

“I went in front, while Millard kept at hand with a shot-gun to stop the lion if it charged. For three hours we followed the blood spoor, often crawling on hands and knees. Suddenly the native tracker pointed into a clearing 20 yards ahead, and we saw the wounded lion crouching behind a bush and watching us. I went down on one knee, and as the lion rose to charge I got a bullet home in the body and killed it.

“Mrs. Engelbrecht told us how her husband had died. He was an extremely powerful man, and when the lion felled him he fought it and thrust one arm down the lion’s throat. His native servant Klaas entered bravely into the

struggle, dragged the rifle from beneath the lion and its victim, and killed the lion. Mr. Engelbrecht had been too severely mauled, however, and died soon afterwards.

“During the trip, Millard shot one of the largest lionesses ever seen in Bechuanaland – it measured 8 feet 51 inches from tip of nose to tip of tail, and 14½ inches round one ankle.

“At one native village we visited, Okavinga, the people asked us to shoot eleven lions which had been walking round the huts night after night, and carrying off the cattle. The dogs barking had not disturbed the marauders at all. One lion had dragged the carcass of a long-horned ox up a hill; it took four men to haul the ox back for bait. A live calf was put out as well, and we sat up that night waiting.

“The lions never gave us a chance. Before we could take aim, the calf was dead, and two lions had vanished in a cloud of dust. Millard wounded one, but when we took the blood spoor next morning, it went straight into reeds – and it is suicide to follow a wounded lion into cover of that sort.

“I think the only game we did not get during the trip was elephant. At the Kasani police camp, they told us of a herd of elephant in the neighbourhood, and we went out after them and found them – twenty-five elephants, including some magnificent tuskers. The moment they caught our scent, however, the whole lot stampeded and we lost them in thick bush.

“Our guides in the Okavango swamp region were Bushmen. A white man would lose his way immediately he left camp. We knew only two words of

their language – tau (lion) and torr (elephant), but they always took us where we wanted to go. They had only one failing; they were afraid of lions, and refused to spoor them. For one stretch of a fortnight we never saw a white man. The Bushmen told us that only one white traveller had gone where our motor-car went, and we identified him as Colonel Naus, the French engineer who is carrying out contract work for the Administration in that unmapped area.”

3

One of the most adventurous jobs in South Africa today is that held by Major H. C. Murdoch, official in charge of the emergency road service in the Kruger game reserve, Transvaal. Again and again on his daily patrols he has found people with their motor-cars broken down and surrounded by wild

animals.

“Near my head-quarters at Letaba recently a man eating lion broke down the wall of a grass hut and seized a sleeping native by the arm,” Major Murdoch told me during one of his visits to Cape Town. “Another native in the hut held on to his friend and shouted for help. The lion was driven off, but the man had been seriously mauled. I did what I could for the man and rushed him to hospital. He died a week later.

“Meanwhile the ranger set out to destroy the lion and was successful. It was a pathetic old outcast of the troop; so hungry that it had been reduced to eating frogs.

“Every lion over two years of age is a killer, but very few are man-eaters. A cub is trained in the law of the wild,

but is not allowed to make a kill in case it allows the game to escape. I believe there are about 2500 lions, apart from the cubs, in my area. A full-grown lion weighs from 600 to 900 lb., as much as three men.

“Now a lion can eat 160 lb. of meat at a sitting, and it has been estimated that 5000 buck are being killed by lions every week in the reserve – roughly, a quarter of a million buck a year. Yet the buck never appear to be in danger of extinction.

“As I carry out my patrols of 100 to 150 miles a day I watch many scenes that the ordinary tourist would give much to see. Often I have sat gazing from my van at lions making their kills. Grisly, but fascinating. Once I watched a lion, two lionesses and four cubs. A lioness herded the cubs into a hollow in the ground – I could imagine

her warning them to remain there. Then the two lionesses trotted off, while the cunning old lion sank down behind a bush.

“Soon the lionesses returned driving a zebra before them. They drove it right up to the lion’s hiding-place. In a moment the lion was on the zebra’s shoulders. One paw, with claws out, gripped the zebra’s nose and mercilessly turned the head backwards. The zebra fell, breaking its own neck.

“With one sweep of the claws, the lion ripped the zebra open. A lioness called the cubs, and they came scampering along and plunged straight inside the victim to eat the heart and lungs. I saw the cubs emerge later, gasping for air, soaked in blood, like half-drowned kittens. They were so gorged with meat that they could hardly stand. A

lioness washed them. Then the greedy old lion, which had eaten too much, was violently ill. Immediately afterwards he started again to satisfy his enormous appetite.

“The lion is a clean killer as a rule. One bite in the neck is usually enough. There is no cat-like mauling of the victim.

“Tourists in the reserve reveal a ‘lion complex,’ and feel they have seen nothing if they do not encounter lions. One of my jobs is to go out at night in search of people who have not returned at the time they were expected.

“Again and again I have found tourists surrounded by lions; they have stopped to change a tyre or make a repair, and have been unable to get away. The prides of lions in the

reserve are large – I have counted twenty-two together. Though I always carry a rifle, I am thankful to say that I have never yet had to use it.

“Some time ago two girls drove into the reserve in a baby car. They stopped when they saw lions on the road, and took photographs. Then they were afraid to go on....

“The lions strolled towards them, a lion on each side of the car, peering and sniffing through the windows. Both girls had fainted when another car arrived and drove the lions away.”

The major has seen lions standing on the running boards of motor-cars and sitting on luggage carriers.

“Lions are seldom encountered on the road except in the tourist season,” he declares. “I believe lions are genuinely interested in motor-cars. They will run

after a car like dogs, watching the wheels go round.

“Once a couple of lions lay down leaning against the front of my car, so that I had to reverse to get away. They fell over as I moved and began playfully scrapping. One lion evidently thought the other had played a joke on him!

“Motorists are limited to a speed of twenty-five miles an hour in the reserve, the reason being that the risk of crashing suddenly into animals is always present. “There is a herd of two hundred and fifty elephants in my area. I have come round a corner and jammed on my brakes to avoid a collision with elephants.

“Lions and elephants, however, are seldom aggressive as long as the tourist remains in his car. The lion

looks upon a motor-car as a strange beast with an unpleasant smell, certainly not worth eating. Only the lioness with cubs and the starving man-eater are dangerous.

4

The boldest lion in recent years, I suppose, was that which surprised Sir Hubert Young, Governor of Northern Rhodesia, and Lady Young in the gardens of Government House at Lusaka. They stood on the terrace and watched the lion move off, in company with a lioness, towards the aerodrome. A police sergeant followed the spoor but never got a chance of a shot.

Native officials at lonely railway stations are often singled out by lions for attention – especially along the Beira railway line. During a recent

tragic period one native woman and two men were killed and three more attacked and mauled; all within five days at one station, Vila Machado. The lions prowled on the line not only at night, but also by day.

So the crack shot of Portuguese East Africa was hastily summoned – “One Shot” Araujo, traffic superintendent of the Trans-Zambesi Railway. He killed three in one night, and, true to his reputation, used only three shots.

An English nurse at a Nyasaland mission, finding the natives terrorised by a man-eating lion, decided to end the nuisance. She injected a dead ox with morphine and left the bait where the lion would find it. The lion dropped unconscious that night and the natives finished it off with their spears.

Colonel Meyer, a well-known hunter in South-West Africa, set out after a wily old lion which had created havoc among the native cattle. He made a perforated bullet, soaked it in Bushman poison, and sat up at night waiting for the lion. As he had anticipated, his shot in the dark only wounded the lion; but they found the body next day when the poison had done its work.

Twice last year lions were seen prowling round Rhodes' tomb in the Matopos. On the Great North Road a lion jumped on to the bonnet of a motor-car, slithered off, and chased the motorist for 200 yards.

It is said that the lion estimates the distance carefully before a spring. There is no need to accept the story of the lion which sprang at a Rhodesian cyclist, and over him, and was seen later practising short jumps. Neverthe-

less, Charles John Anderson and other keen observers have declared that lions return sulkily to ambush after an unsuccessful attack, retracing the ground step by step in an effort to measure the distance for future reference.

A duel to the death between a lion and a crocodile was recorded not long ago. Mr. P. van Zyl, a Bushmanland farmer, told me of a battle between lion and gemsbok bull. It occurred long ago, and no one saw it, but Mr. van Zyl found the two great animals lying dead together. From spoors easily read it appeared that the lion stalked a small herd of gemsbok which had crossed an open space to reach a water-hole. Then the lion's presence was noticed by the gemsbok bull.

As the lion made its spring the gemsbok swung round and lowered its

lance-like horns to meet the charge. The left horn went through the lion's throat and out of the flank. Down went lion and gemsbok. There they lay until Mr. van Zyl, seeing vultures, went to the spot. The gemsbok may have been unhurt, but it could not withdraw the horns and thus died of starvation, still locked to the dead lion.

It would be interesting to know the greatest mountain height lions have ever reached. Climbers on Mount Kenya, in East Africa, last year found a bull eland lying dead in front of a hut at a height of 10,000 feet. All round were the marks of a lion. The native porters declared that a pride of lions was known to live there.

CHAPTER 15

PANS OF SOUTH AFRICA

ONE night in the Kalahari I camped on the edge of a small, cracked mud pan. I look back on it now with longing, though it was not a luxurious camp. The tent strained in a cold wind. Strings of biltong and jackal skins made a wild frieze between two kameeldoorns, and from a branch hung my leather coat, bandoliers, canvas water-bags and field-glasses. A board on petrol cases formed the table, groaning under the weight of a brandy bottle and some pickles into which the sand had entered.

Men sat round this table of content on biscuit tins. The fire, with its red glow and white ash, promised coffee. Somewhere in the darkness our boy Willem was cleaning the tin plates. It was impossible for anyone to imagine

he was anywhere but in the desert.

The Kalahari has more pans of different sizes and formations than any other territory in the world. We had crossed many with our motor-cars and heavy truck; and here beside us was another of the thousands. Easily enough the talk moved on to the pans of South Africa, those weird depressions which the geologists have never fully explained. I think that I took a leading part in this Kalahari controversy, for I had spent some of the most exciting days of my life on the surface of a famous pan.

That was Verneuk Pan, in the loneliness of Bushmanland, at the time when Sir Malcolm Campbell was racing there with his Bluebird in an unsuccessful attempt to break the world's land speed record. I have a picture of Verneuk over my bed. It is

good to stare at that wonderful brown expanse when a city bedroom seems too small. There is nothing cramped or mean about the great pans, stretching out hard and flat and featureless to the horizon. I went flying at midnight from Verneuk Pan, taking off and landing without flares, without disaster. In few places is such a performance safe – I am not at all sure it was safe at Verneuk. I saw the cloud of dust, exactly like a smoke-screen, thrown up by the hard-driven Bluebird as it passed the timekeeper. And I was there years afterwards, with the roaring and the cheers as memories, seeking a magnum of champagne that was flung away at the end of a gay fortnight to join the heap of beer bottles. With water at 18s. a drum it almost paid us to drink beer.

Verneuk is the largest pan in

Bushmanland, more than 20 miles long by 9 miles wide. There are far greater pans in the Kalahari, not all of them surveyed. The pans of Bushmanland, however, have been well known to those wandering sheep farmers called trekboers for many years. During the rare rains the pans are filled like brimming saucers. From the air I have seen the tracks left by generations of men and animals and bygone wagons, meandering over the veld from pan to pan.

It is always possible to forecast rain in the pan country by the movements of the insects. Millions of scorpions, beetles, tarantulas, and many snakes, too, find snug homes in the cracked pan surfaces. They dare not be caught by the water. Hours before the first drop falls the insect army is on the march across the baked mud, all intent

on reaching high ground. Veldt rodents, the plague-carrying gerbilles, accompany them. There are no false alarms in the world where instinct rules.

It is unusual to find growth on the pans, but many of these vloers (Afrikaans for floors) yield valuable deposits of salt. Strange it is to gaze on the inexhaustible salt area known as Great Commissioner's Pan, not far from Calvinia. Here is a stretch of 11 miles, with a brilliant crust that looks like snow. A wonderful place in the days of the springbok migrations, when a hunting party would bring down a thousand head in a single day and salt the venison for biltong at Great Commissioner's Pan.

It is easy to lose the way on any large pan, for they are the very home of the mirage when the sun is up. A dog

grows to the size of an elephant. Motor-cars are seen upside down and racing across the sky. The smallest puddle of water is thrown up and magnified into a lake. No wonder Verneuk was given its expressive name – “deceptive.” But the strangest tale of a pan mirage I ever heard was told by a diamond prospector who had made a number of hard journeys along the coast to the north of Luderitzbucht. Each time he crossed a certain lonely pan he saw a small house with two windows and a door just out of the centre. It was a pretty little house of German architecture that the *fata Morgana* presented to him, and he saw it so often that he remembered every detail. Soon afterwards he was travelling inland by railway from Luderitzbucht when, at a wayside station 150 miles from the coast, he

saw the real house. He got out of the train and touched it to make sure.

Scientists, as I have said, are doubtful about the origin of the pans. Livingstone declared they were the remains of ancient lakes. "No satisfactory explanation has yet been given," says Dr. A. W. Rogers in his *Geology of the Cape Colony*. He suggests that some, such as Verneuk Pan, were once the beds of rivers. These rivers were choked by sand during successive droughts, and when the floods came at last the sand was spread out uniformly over large areas.

Wind action is given by Dr. A. L. du Toit, another well-known South African geologist, as the cause. The softer layers of the surface have been cut away by the prevailing westerly winds of Bushmanland, leaving the harder rocks below to form the bottom

of a shallow depression. It has also been suggested that the pans were flattened out by glaciers.

I like best the explanation advanced by the old hunters and firmly believed by the farmers and many others to this day. They say the pans were made by animals. Large antelope like the gemsbok, zebra and smaller creatures would come to drink at a spring. Their thirst slaked, they would roll in the mud, hollowing out and enlarging the moist area through the centuries, until at last a pan was formed. The animals still visit the pans to lick the salt on the surface or the saline flavour of the white limestone formation at the edges. You will find rocks worn smooth by a million eager tongues. Along the approaches to a Kalahari pan the tracker will point out the footprints of all the wild beasts, from

the unmistakable pug-marks of lion to the huge hoofs of giraffe. At Verneuk Pan I was shown the imprints of wild ostriches in herds, such as one never sees today.

Footprints on the pan tell many a story, but for sheer thrill I shall not forget an experience while driving along an unmapped river-bed to the east of the Nossob. This is the "Great Thirst" region of the Kalahari, where you may go for hundreds of miles without finding water. Imagine our surprise when the dried-up river broadened out into a pan and we found in the centre a man-made well. There was no water; indeed, we learnt later that "Baster" half-caste hunters of the Nossob had started the excavation and abandoned it when they found no trace of moisture. The well was marked on our rough survey, and we stopped

there again on the return next day. Over our own footprints we saw the tiny imprints of Bushman feet. No doubt they had watched us pass. Probably they were still watching from cover on the fringe of the pan. We never saw them.

In Bushmanland (where you may count the surviving Bushmen on the fingers of your hands) scores of farms are named after the neighbouring pans. The word pan is the most common of all terminations – Angelierspan, Voordeelspan, Graspan. I once drove all night through the pan country. There is a long deviation which is the only way to escape, being bogged in rainy weather, and this route led me on to the "Groot Vloer," a chain of pans with a mud farm-house somewhere on the edge of each pan. I could see no stars owing to the rain, and at night the

method of taking compass bearing (still followed by motorists in flat, empty Bushmanland) was impracticable. But there were tracks, some of them meaningless, on the pan surface. I spent most of the night following these tracks, finding farm-houses, knocking up farmers who were not glad to see me. I noted the farm names, and in the morning my map showed that I had zigzagged down that succession of pans, calling at almost every remote farm on the way. It was smooth travelling, for the pans are nothing less than earthen billiard-tables. Yet the relief when I struck a rough veld track at last was tremendous. In the days before motor-cars men lost their lives when they lost their way on a waterless pan.

The pan mirages, which I have mentioned, have been responsible for

queer errors of surveying in these far corners of South Africa. Even now, I believe, the official survey of Bushmanland has not been completed. Early this century, when farms were allotted, the owners had vague ideas of the size of their holdings. The first surveyors, struggling against mirage, were known to err to the extent of 2000 acres on a single farm. (In this dry area a farm of 20,000 acres is not particularly large.) New surveys have given many a farmer more land than he expected to possess.

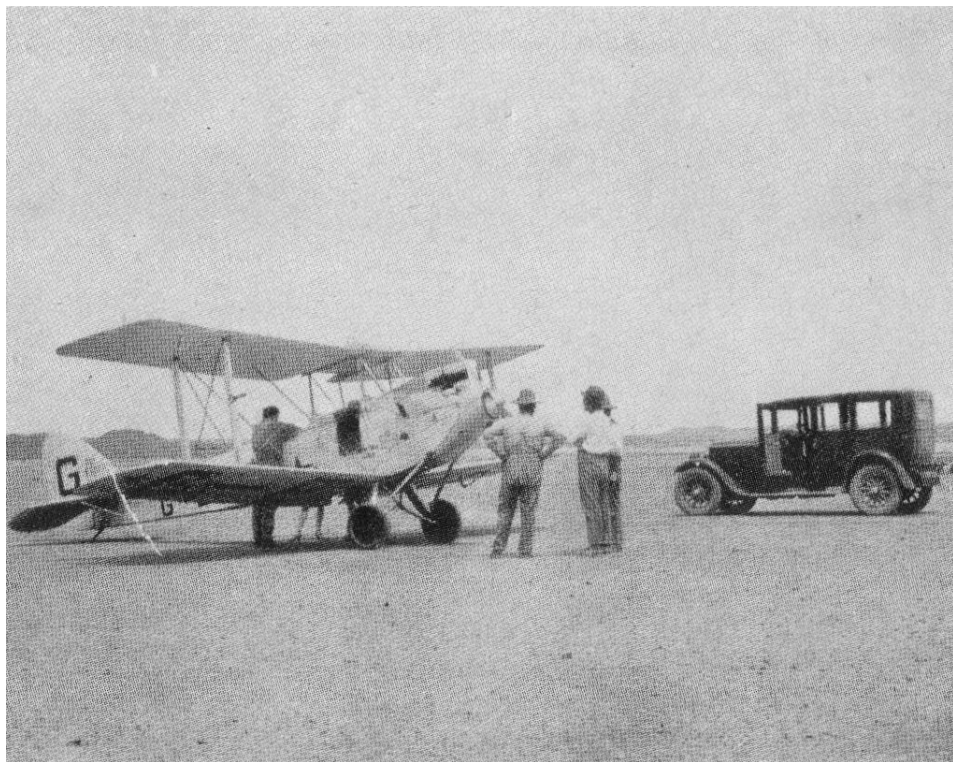
Many of South Africa's richest diamond mines are situated in pan country. I need mention only the famous Dutoitspan. The belief is widely held by prospectors that there is some relation between the pans and the diamond pipes. Unfortunately not all pans are diamondiferous, and a vast

amount of energy has been wasted scratching worthless ground. Fragments of the Stone Age have been brought out of the limestone of Kalahari pans by these treasure-hunters; but seldom have they unearthed the precious “blink-klippies.”

Most of the Kalahari outposts have been built beside pans, the reason being that water is usually found where the limestone outcrops at the edge. Ghanzi, Tshane, Lehututu and Kalkfontein – all look out on blinding white pan surfaces where the heat rises in pitiless waves. At Ghanzi I saw a wind-sock fluttering over Gemsbok Pan, an emblem of hope rather than a guide to the natural aerodrome. These lonely places cannot expect aeroplanes save in times of emergency and during the epidemics of foot-and-mouth disease.

At Lethlo Pan not long ago hundreds of animals were trapped in the clinging mud. They came to drink at a spot where there had always been water, even in the driest seasons. That year the supply failed. Herd after herd of thirsty buck rushed into the morass; wildebeest, reedbuck, roan antelope. A hunter who was there told me that he blamed the elephants for the tragedy. One large herd sucked up the last of the water, wallowed according to custom and went trumpeting away. It was a feast for the vultures.

Largest of all the pans is the Etosha Pan in South-West Africa – largest not only in that territory, but in Africa. This indeed must rank among the wonders of the world. It covers more than thirteen hundred square miles, this dry bed of an inland sea. No human being has ever crossed it. No



Finest natural aerodrome in the world.

one ever will. For about a mile inwards the surface will stand the weight of a man, but beyond all is black and saline slime. In that danger zone there is a cemetery of the great beasts, a line of bleached bones that make one wonder whether the legend of the “elephant graveyard” may not be true after all. Certainly there are elephant skeletons in the slime, crouched in attitudes of death.

During the German occupation of the country a castle was built on the edge of the Etosha Pan, held by a large garrison against sudden raids by the unconquered Ovambos in the north. Today the castle is in ruins. The game, after licking salt on the pan, take shelter under the broken walls, wander in the courtyard and drink from the spring and water-troughs where the chargers of a German cavalry regiment

were once led. It would be possible to shoot lions from the crumbling ramparts, but the whole Etosha Pan. area is now a game reserve.

Thus the Etosha Pan remains a great sight. In the daytime you may see the blue wildebeest and inquisitive zebra, or a herd of gemsbok two hundred strong racing across the wagon track. After dark the more timid antelope, the wily jackal and loud-voiced hyena emerge from the bush.

From the Cunene River southwards to Cape Town you cannot travel far without encountering the pan formation. Road builders seek them out, for their task may be left and renewed on the far side – a pan surface is infinitely superior to the most modern highway. It is a relief, after weary miles of sand driving, to touch these hard saucers and see the speedometer needle creep-

ing up in a burst of speed. I like the pans of South Africa, these dry and dazzling mysteries. The picture over my bed is a symbol of escape from the city. On the pans there is air and room to move.

CHAPTER 16

WATER FOR THE WILDERNESS

OUT on the lonely veld to the north of Kimberley the hush that has lasted for ages has been broken by the tra-a-tat of jackhammers, clamour of mixers and crushers, trundling of giant shovels and the muffled thunder of dynamite.

They are excavating and building out there on a scale South Africa has never seen before. It is a feat of engineering more like the Suez Canal than an irrigation scheme. For this is the Vaal-Hartz plan becoming a reality – the greatest attempt to water the desert ever made in the Union.

No suitable, able-bodied man has been refused work there since the main task started. If two hundred willing labourers arrived tomorrow they would find

immediate employment. And within the two years that remain for the completion of the scheme, hundreds of men will find healthy occupation there with first-class food and pay that will enable them to save.

South Africa is cut up by mountains to such an extent that only in one place can 50,000 morgen (106,250 acres) of irrigable ground be found. That place is the dry Hartz valley in the Cape Province. It is estimated that there will be room for six thousand settlers when the water comes down the largest cutting in Africa to reach the very frontier of the Kalahari.

Nearly two thousand men were toiling under the sun along this vast canal on the day when the resident engineer drove me from camp to construction camp. I saw taking shape an idea that was first suggested half a century ago.

Surveyors were sent out in the eighties, engineers designed a scheme that was the forerunner of this gigantic development. Cecil Rhodes himself observed the slope of the land between the Vaal and the Hartz rivers – the triangular area that cried out for moisture. The Cape Parliament discussed it again and again, but regretted that “the financial condition of the Colony would not warrant the expenditure of money on the said works.” A half-hearted attempt to persuade a private enterprise to undertake the scheme failed, and for years the wilderness waited unrefreshed.

Now the work is well advanced. Already the waters of the Vaal have reached an experimental farm 25 miles from the huge “pick up” weir at Warrenton, and all the crops, cattle feeds and fruits that the soils of the

Hartz valley are capable of producing are being grown by experts. That, of course, is the phase into which chance enters – the gamble of farming vicissitudes and world prices. As an engineering feat, it is already clear that the Vaal-Hartz is a success. A bold feat, indeed, these officials of the Irrigation Department have achieved without calling for help from outside. New records have been made in every part of the construction.

First there is the storage unit 350 miles from the weir, the Vaalbank dam near Vereeniging, soon to become the largest artificial sheet of water in Africa, larger even than Assouan. Johannesburg will draw water from the sixty square miles of this lake; indeed it is believed that the dam will be completed only just in time to save the ever-growing city from water

shortage. For this reserve supply the Rand Water Board will pay £240,000 towards the cost of the scheme. Thus the Vaal River will become a steady stream, a safeguard against hunger and drought.

I started my tour at the next step in the harnessing of the Vaal – the weir near Warrenton. Here the river has been blocked by half a mile of moulded concrete, equipped with all the modern scour and sluice gates, silt traps and electrical controls. Once the work was wiped out by floods. Patiently the engineers built again, and if the Vaal comes raging down in November this year the weir will stand the strain.

At this point the water will be taken from mid-stream to avoid silt, the bugbear of irrigation. It will be led off along the main canals, about a hundred miles of concrete-lined waterways,

through distributing canals 120 miles in length, and finally by a tertiary network of 500 miles of canals actually supplying the ground. The lining of all these canals means that the water can run at higher speed with less evaporation and absorption. No other irrigation scheme in South Africa has been concrete-lined throughout. Cheaper cement and more efficient machinery have made this advance possible.

Similarly the improvement of drills and explosives have enabled the engineers to avoid deviations. “We go right through that hill,” the resident engineer told me, pointing to a hump on the skyline. “One of our tunnels, 4500 feet in length, will be the longest in South Africa. In the old days they would have been afraid to tackle a job like that.”

Most of the excavation work, including nearly all the first 15 miles from the weir, has been through rock. The policy is to use machinery for this heavy task while the final trimming is done by hand. Caterpillar tractors haul out the boulders. Cranes lift the concrete side walls into position. Altogether there will be 200,000 cubic yards of concrete lining used as the canals take dips and cuttings in their stride, dive beneath the railway lines, and penetrate the red Kalahari sand in long straight furrows. Night and day the work goes on, excavating machinery clattering and concrete mixers grinding under the floodlights. Thus overhead costs are kept down.

For the men there is a working day of nine hours, with one hour's rest for food. The human side of the enterprise forms a story of which fragments have

been told in every corner of South Africa. There is not a town or village in the Union which has not sent men to the great labour camps of the Vaal-Hartz, and tales of their treatment have been conflicting. Some have literally rolled up with their free railway passes singing:

*"We are the boys of Stony Hill,
We've never worked, we never
will."*

They were as good as their word, and departed within a few days to the relief of the officials concerned. Others have remained to prove that white South Africans are not incapable of hard physical labour, and incidentally to earn more money and more comfortable conditions.

"All the men we have here now are willing workers," declared the resident

engineer. "When new batches arrive, they are medically examined, given injections for enteric, and allowed a few days to look round. That is the period in which the slackers leave-before they have done a day's work.

"New men are placed in training gangs for a month. They are not pushed, and thus they harden gradually before being drafted into the older gangs. This system is necessary, for the experienced hands are paid, to some extent, by results, and they would resent the help of new recruits."

It seems that the first month is the testing period. After that the men seek promotion and look forward to working on the scheme until the end. About a thousand men in the camps at the present time have been there for two years; and most of them will be there when the job is finished.

Pick-and-shovel work is a stage in the labourer's progress that is soon passed by an ambitious man. At the moment about two hundred white labourers are in this class; the rest have become sufficiently skilful for concrete and other work.

Two great classes of South Africans seek work, either through labour offices or direct, on the Vaal-Hartz scheme. Many farm boys fill in most of the year there, returning to their homes at ploughing time. Then there are the city-bred youths with no particular trades who have not fitted into the industrial scheme. Apart from these, every strange and ordinary occupation has a representative in the camps – sailors and surveyors, lawyers, accountants, teachers.

Labourers start at 2s. a day, with an additional bonus of 1s. 6d. a day saved

up and handed over at the end of the first year. His food, valued at 1s. 6d. a day (and worth, as I saw, considerably more), is free. Even this system could not be regarded as generous if a man were pinned down to the minimum. The pay-sheets that I inspected, however, revealed an average wage of about 7s. a day, including food.

I saw, too, a number of typical progress sheets showing the rapid advancement made by men who had proved their worth. Thus a labourer engaged two years ago is now a transport foreman at £1 a day. Others have become sanitary inspectors at 17s. 6d., statistical clerks at 15s., timekeepers at 12s. 6d. Some of the skilled tradesmen are earning £30 a month, with a house for 30s., and free light and water. Men above the grade of labourer receive paid leave and sick

leave after the first year.

And now the commissariat, cause of grumbling and inefficiency in labour camps ever since the first Cape Town castle was built. When the Vaal-Hartz work started the grievances of the men were not all exaggerated. Today there can be few boarding-houses in South Africa serving more enjoyable meals. Even the hotels cannot purchase food of higher quality than that of the Vaal-Hartz commissariat. I made a good meal of it on the spot, I peered into kitchens, pantries and cooking-pots, and I am glad to be able to go into detail on the subject.

Every man can have as many helpings as he may request. At first, when the normal first effects of hard work were observed, the average consumption of food per head was 7 lb. a day. It has dropped to 5.81 lb. – still an ample

ration. Everything is ordered in bulk, so that as regards quality the engineers eat the same food as the labourers – the best. The superior grades are supplied with pickles and extra delicacies; they are waited upon instead of lining up; and they have more cooks to put frills on the menus. But even the labourers are well satisfied with the abundant, well-cooked dishes served every day of the week.

One wise rule must be observed if a man calls for a second helping. He must eat his vegetables. A number of labourers, accustomed to an unbalanced bread-and-meat diet on farms, dislike vegetables; and some of the early outbreaks of scurvy in the camps were traced to this cause. Today dried, stewed and fresh fruit are included in the daily menus.

Breakfast is arranged so that the men may carry away in their mess tins enough food, according to choice, for a hearty lunch.

At lunch-time on Saturday, when a large number of men are in camp, there are eggs and bacon, vegetables, rice and raisins. Sausages and curried rice figured in a Sunday-dinner menu I saw, with fish, beans, bread and butter and jam, dried fruit and custard for supper. And these were not merely diet sheets kept for the purpose of hoodwinking visitors. I lunched in a Vaal-Hartz mess-room and verified all that I was told.

Coffee is often a weak, inferior swill in such places as this. The Vaal-Hartz brew is 75 per cent coffee, 25 chicory, which is just as the men like it. Steam cookers are used in the kitchens, potatoes are peeled by electricity,

fresh foods are preserved in specially-built cool-rooms.

The long, clean mess-rooms are all equipped with stages. There the “talkies” are heard, boxing matches, concerts, debates, night classes and Church services are arranged. A former musician on the works has organised a jazz band. Outside there are fields for cricket and football. A golf course has been laid out on one section. The recreation fund provides for these and many other entertainments.

Much of the work is constantly on the move, and at intervals the camps must move, too. For that reason the accommodation is plain and transportable rather than comfortably solid. All the essentials are there, however, and even a corrugated-iron bunk-house, with its “double-deckers,” is preferable to a

tent in the wind.

Naturally each camp has its own shop. Although Kimberley is more than forty miles from the nearest camp prices have been cut below the town level. Good working boots for 12s., a pair of worsted trousers for 25s., a bicycle for £3 – these were tickets that caught my eye. Mixed sweets form one of the best-selling lines. Profits go back to the men by way of the recreation clubs. Each camp commandant has a free circulating library in his office.

The pride of the scheme, of course, is the permanent township of Andalusia, 64 miles from Kimberley and close to Border station on the railway line to Rhodesia. Bare veld two years ago; now a cluster of smart offices and brick houses on a ridge, eight hundred people, school, hospital and work-

shops.

This is the Vaal-Hartz headquarters. The boundaries of Bechuanaland, the Transvaal and the Cape Province all meet in Andalusia. One boundary runs through a house. The occupants have breakfast in the Cape, sleep in the Transvaal, and choose the cheaper province when there are taxes to be paid.

Boys of eighteen and men of fifty are making the Vaal-Hartz canal. There is a blind mattress-maker, a one-legged cleaner and a deaf-and-dumb carpenter. A gang of coloured men were given work to assist depressed Kimberley, and about three hundred natives are employed by private contractors. Otherwise the huge labour force is white. Scores, no doubt, will settle on the land to which they are now bringing water. The waste of the

ages is being checked by engineering skill and at a cost of £4,000,000 – the largest sum ever voted by the Union Government for one job of work in one area. No other irrigation scheme south of the Equator approaches the Vaal-Hartz in magnitude. A memorable day it will be when the canal gates are opened at last and the water pours down towards the baked earth at 6000 gallons a second.

CHAPTER 17

STRANGE WATERFRONT

BEIRA is unlike any other waterfront in East Africa. People who have lived there, and survived, declare there is no port like Beira in the world. They call it the toughest town in Africa, and they never forget it.

More tales are told of Beira than of African towns centuries older. The name of Beira litters the pages of autobiographies and the reminiscences of pioneers. It has inspired some of the finest African fiction. Yet I have still to read a word in praise of Beira – reckless, drunken Beira that men of every nation have cursed and quitted the moment their luck turned.

Fifty years ago there was no Beira. Away inland, however, the pioneer columns were settling and civilising

Rhodesia, and seeking an outlet to the sea. A glance at the inadequate maps of the day showed that there was nothing for it but the Portuguese territory, with a port on the Pungwe River as the obvious link with the ocean. Portuguese gunboats nosed into the estuary, the bar was found to be navigable, and a certain Colonel Paiva d'Andrada explored the site that has since become notorious.

Thus Beira, ill-favoured child of necessity, was born in 1891 and given the fitting name. For Beira means sand, and sand is still the first and last impression of the unhappy traveller landing there. Years ago one stepped out of a rowing boat on to a sandy beach gleaming with bottles. There should be a bottle on Beira's coat of arms; no other town has driven so many of its citizens to drink.

(Luderitzbucht and Port Nolloth, on the other side of Africa, both display the same symbols of past desperate revelry, but they are healthy seaside resorts in comparison with Beira.)

In those early days Beira consisted of a tin customs shed, Martini's dubious hotel, a wretched building that served as headquarters of the Mozambique Company, and a yellow, fever-ridden band of dwarfs who proclaimed by their bugles that they formed the garrison. They lived in tin boxes, praying for relief. An area set apart for officials was called the Rua Conselheiro Castilho – bungalows on stilts in a mangrove swamp.

Cecil Rhodes passed through at this stage of Beira's progress, voyaging up-river to Fontesvilla in a crazy paddle-wheeler named the *Kimberley*. Captain Dickie, the master, provided

food and drink at ruling prices. When the calls for whisky were unsatisfactory Captain Dickie ran the ship aground on a sand-bank below Fontesvilla. Mosquitoes came out to greet the passengers, the faint breeze caused by the vessel's movement vanished, and in this predicament men resorted to the bar. Meanwhile the black crew, directed by a watchful Captain Dickie, struggled with kedge anchors and winches to refloat the ship. Sometimes their efforts failed. The whisky was not disappearing fast enough and there was much delay.

Rhodes, aware of the river custom, learnt, when he booked his passage, that there were two cases of whisky and one of champagne on board the *Kimberley*. He bought the lot outright – for £25, and Captain Dickie made the run to Fontesvilla in twelve hours

– a record.

Fontesvilla at that period was probably the unhealthiest place in Africa. The death-rate in the railway construction camp was alarming – malaria, black-water, whisky and lions carried off white adventurers and black labour so fast that men finally declared that every sleeper laid on the Beira-Mashonaland railway represented one life. The same reckoning was kept, I found, on the Matadi-Kinshasa railway in the Belgian Congo; but the Beira figures must have come fairly near the truth.

Railway construction jobs draw a queer crowd, like vultures gathering for a feast. The men who passed through Beira to build railways and bridges, to work newly-discovered mines, to find wealth in a hundred forms or create it for others – these

were hard citizens, and they left their mark on the ramshackle seaport. They fought with fists, knives and revolvers, and always they drank. Serious rioting occurred when three hundred Arabs and Abyssinians, bound for the mines of Rhodesia, attacked the Portuguese and almost overpowered the garrison. White residents saved the day.

Beira stands 18 inches above high tide, so that there was no margin of safety until a concrete sea-wall was built to keep the combined forces of the Pungwe and Busi rivers at bay. Again and again the sea swept houses away. Floods breached the first wall, and the early disasters were repeated. There were fires, but no fire-brigade was organised. Soon after Beira had been raised by Royal decree from Lisbon to the status of a city there was an invasion of mosquitoes on a scale the

fever-racked settlement had never known before. Lions raided the outlying houses; they still prowled occasionally on the golf course. But the lion that seeks meat in Beira makes an unwise choice. The citizens fondle their rifles as other suburban folk cherish golf-clubs.

As a mushroom town, it was not to be expected that Beira would give rise to great beauty in local architecture. Beira, unfortunately, was not abandoned like the boom towns of the United States. The dilapidated buildings remained until they rusted, the sad streets never attempted to become even shadows of those pleasant continental thoroughfares found in other Portuguese colonies. Black muddy creeks marred the Beira sand. There was that background of palms and tropical growth which looks so

well on the travel posters and becomes so depressing on the spot. But the great wonder of old Beira as I first saw it was the transportation system granted by a benevolent authority. It was impossible to move for ever in streets of loose sand. No motorcar had yet penetrated the Beira wilderness. So a tramway system of 18-inch gauge was laid down, trolleys dumped on the rails, and Shangaans found to propel these garden seats on wheels. There were points and side-tracks, busy junctions, smart trolleys with awnings and crazy trolleys that reflected the shiftlessness of their owners. I was in Beira again recently, and long before I arrived someone told me that the trolley lines had been torn up and replaced by a modern 'bus service. It was true. But out towards the Ponta Gea, beyond the newly-paved aveni-

das, I came upon a derelict line and pile of ugly ghosts, the trolleys flung aside for ever. Beira has had the same effect on a number of men, and the sight provoked melancholy thoughts.

Bars flourished in Beira in the days when Zambesi Jack slaked his thirst there, before he became Trader Horn the author. They were exactly the bars one would rely upon finding in such an outpost of progress. Whisky was 3s. a tot, beer 3s. 6d. a bottle. Often it was too hot to sleep and too expensive to woo a drunken slumber. Then the cunning old-timers would buy a keg of vino tinto, dilute it moderately with water to remove the burning flavour, drink deeply and go out like so many guttering candles.

Bad places, those bars. Open to the pavement, raucous with accordion or jangling piano and always with the

harsh laughter of waterfront women, those bars claimed many a golden hoard and hard-won pay-day. If extradition laws had been effective in bygone Beira, there would have been a marvellous total in rewards for the detective who stepped into one of the taverns with a list of “wanted” men. I do not think many men would have cared to make the attempt.

Yet Beira was a gateway of adventure and still is. For every Von Veltheim who plotted there and planned the recovery of “Kruger millions,” a hundred honest men passed through to win ivory at the risk of their lives; to plant tea in the healthy uplands of Nyasaland or prospect the rivers of Mozambique for gold. Beira has been the base for countless shooting expeditions, a place known to all the famous hunters, a vanished company.

Beira has changed. Recently I heard Beira called a “reformed harlot,” a description which fits like the paint on the younger Beira’s face. The town is more respectable than it was, but beneath the cement and beyond the show windows there is something entirely disreputable which cannot be lived down. The atmosphere of Beira still speaks of a reckless past. It can no more be brushed away than the sand that remains under the flame trees.

Today the worst of the bars have disappeared, by order. Beira society meets on the long veranda of an hotel that has seen many vicissitudes, and has now become admirable. When you listen to the talk at sundown, there where so many characters gathered, you realise that the spirit of Beira has not altered. Without venom the same scandalous tales of men and women in

the grip of the tropics are told. You find that safaris have not become mere rambles, that men still live by the rifle and that hunting encounters are not less desperate. Officials in distant backwaters are villains still. The hushed voices speak of treasure on the caravan route to Sofala, or gold in unmapped gullies. One learns that the river steamers still breed reckless humourists, the trains are packed with more excitement than any Orient Express. All these things are discussed with rich anecdote and emphatic ring of glasses as the whisky bottles are handed to each patron to pour out the tot he favours, and the sun goes down.

The most inspiring view is the waterfront, where the liners wait to carry the fortunate away from Beira. When I first entered that muddy harbour there were no wharves. Today

the “B.I.” with their black hulls, the lilac Union Castle ships, grey Portuguese “Empreza” liners and gay funnelled Germans may go alongside to load copper from the Congo border, chrome ore, sugar and coco-nut oil.

The beggars are all in gaol, and the prisoners are no longer allowed to thrust pleading claws through the bars to beseech the passing citizen for cigarettes. A new Beira indeed, outwardly. Red-roofed villas stand where the tin shacks crouched in the sand. Green blinds shut out the glaring sun. There are traffic lights at busy cross-roads, but I am glad to say they do not operate; they are so different from the lights Beira once knew.

In a cane and bamboo ring decorated with palms and flags, bullfights are held. There is a brass band from the “Escola des Artes,” the British and

Portuguese residents arrive in stiff white clothes and the Governor enters his box. The bulls have blunted horns, no horses are used, and the matadors run into less danger than those who go out into the surrounding country with guns.

The Beira scene is not so exciting nowadays. A stray crocodile, swept down the river by floods, was seen lumbering up a ship’s gangway not long ago. But there are no more shots in the night to disturb the drinkers on the terrace in the gardens. Now the talk is of harbour improvements, new deep-water wharves and cold storage plants. That is progress, but it is not the Beira that the ivory hunters knew.

CHAPTER 18

VIKINGS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

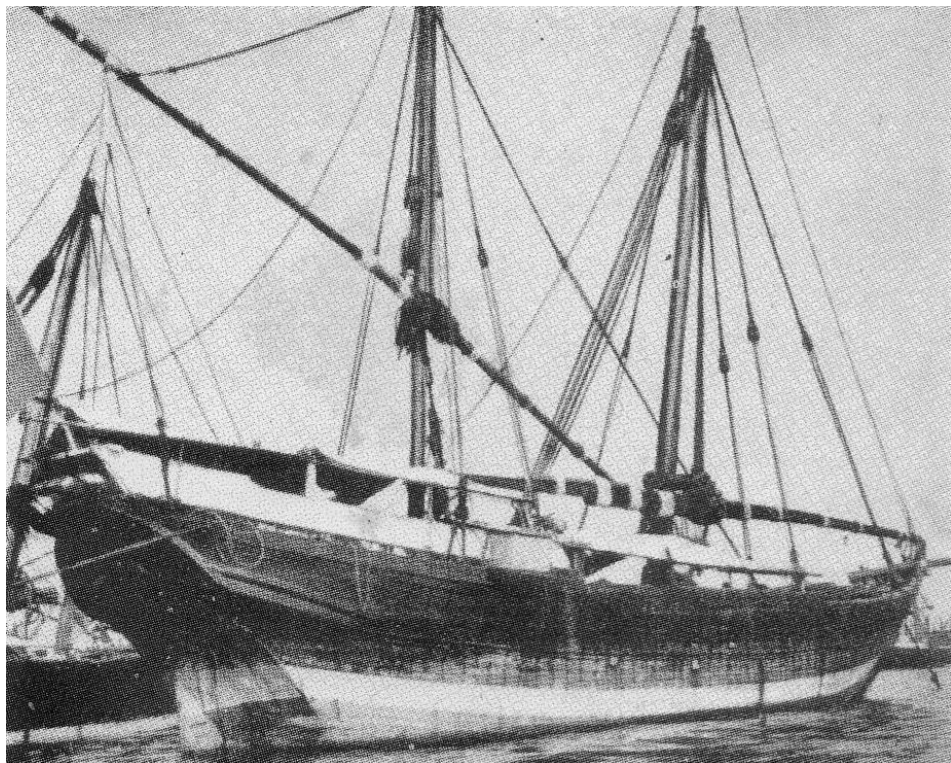
SHIPS without decks or engines, chart or compass, still cross the Indian Ocean to East Africa. They were trading along that coast before the first Portuguese explorers burst into those seas. They are running between the Persian Gulf and Zanzibar now, fleets hundreds strong, while the *Queen Mary* maintains her trans-Atlantic time-table.

They are the dhows, the ocean-going sailing ships that have not changed since the days of Ptolemy. I have sat at the tiller of a fast coasting dhow off Zanzibar, yarned with dhow skippers and crews in Mombasa, Mozambique and Colombo. But I have never learnt all their secrets. The dhows, with their rakish lateen-rig and dark, battered hulls, have about them an air of

mystery that is not easy to penetrate. By the rules of modern commerce, they should have been driven from the ocean long ago. Yet they sail on, defiant relics of an earlier age of seafaring.

The largest are about the size of Drake's ship, the *Golden Hind*. Some that venture over from the Persian Gulf to Mombasa, 3000 miles, do not displace more than ten tons. Their Arab crews are the Vikings of the East, accomplishing in their high-pooped dhows the deeds of adventure the old Norsemen achieved in their long ships.

I remember a dhow that came drifting into Colombo harbour after a hard passage from the Maldives – the shining atolls that are strung out in line for 400 miles just north of the Equator. My boatman spoke the island dialect,



A bombay dhow in harbour.

and we boarded the dhow to see how she had fared.

Her mast was the bent trunk of a coconut palm, her sails were mats. The fibre rigging was frayed. Sheets of corrugated iron covered with thatch formed the cabin. Nearly all the small bottles used for water storage were empty. Her crew of thin and timid young islanders seemed unaware of any feat of seamanship in bringing this flimsy ark safely to port. If it had happened in Western waters the news would have been on the front page.

Sometimes the frail Maldivé dhows keep company in mid-ocean. Fleets of a hundred sail have been sighted, the dhows in the outer lines burning torches at night to keep the whole formation together.

How do the dhows find their way

across thousands of miles of open Indian Ocean? I knew the Maldivé Islanders had their wooden sextants, and navigation tables copied from modern books. But most of the Arabs, Indians and Swahilis display none of the up-to date skill of the island people. How is it done ?

At last I formed the opinion that it was indeed a “hit or miss” affair, the chances of disaster varying according to the experience of the dhow skipper. Some there are with a knowledge of the stars. They tell you that when a star appears in a familiar position, a known port or island must lie under it. Others are able to estimate their latitude with the aid of a wooden instrument, two arms set at right angles with a knotted string across. This gives a fair idea of the angle of the Pole Star. Longitude, of course,

remains a mystery to such primitive navigators until they sight land.

On board a fine “baggala” that had sailed all the way from Bombay to Colombo I saw a shining binnacle. Many Arab dhows still put to sea without a compass, in spite of the fact that the Arabs have been credited with using some form of magnetised needle when they first met seafarers from Europe.

The sun and the steady monsoon winds are the great signs of direction observed by dhow sailors. The position of the sun at dawn and dusk is important. If there is no sun, and fog or clouds cover the stars, then Allah is held responsible for the safety of the ship. It does not matter if currents take her off her course. As long as there is water in the earthenware jars, rice and dried fish in the cooking-pots, a week

has no significance.

“There are no devils save imaginary devils,” say the stout-hearted Arabs. Nevertheless, a bold proverb is a poor substitute for a sextant, and these rough methods of navigation do lead to wrecks and heavy loss of life. Whole fleets of dhows have been driven ashore on Cape Guardafui – the sinister cape that was called, even late last century, “the unknown horn of Africa.” Weather-lore is all right up to a point. The white man’s liner, with her barometers, echo-sounding gear, wireless direction finder and chronometers may carry too many aids to navigation. There is no doubt that the dhows have too few.

But it is impossible to shake the Oriental philosophy of these aged, sea-wise Arabs. On a coast, where they recognise every landmark by day, they

prefer to anchor at night. Ask the skipper why he wastes time like this, and the answer comes with a smile. "I cannot see in the dark. Also, the night is the best time for sleeping. Do not count the days of a month which do not belong to thee."

Every long voyage starts with a ceremony of drums, music and dancing to appease the spirits of the deep. Charms are fixed to the bowsprit and eyes painted on the bows, a precaution copied from the Chinese junks. Then, with the crew singing a chanty that the monsoons have blown down these Eastern seas for two thousand years, the dhow makes sail for blue water.

One day I stood on the beach at Port Amelia, that wonderful harbour in Portuguese East Africa, watching the Arab shipwrights building a dhow.

They were working to a plan that was old when the ancient Britons were paddling their coracles. Not a nail did they use as they laid the planking along the hard baulks that made the ribs. Every plank and timber, deck-beam and stringer in a dhow is fastened with wooden pegs. This method of construction is based on a legend, but it has common sense behind it. It is related in the *Thousand Nights and One Night* that at a dangerous place on the East African coasts called the "rocks of the Adamants" there was a magnetic island of iron mines. On approaching this dreaded spot a ship would fall asunder, her nails attracted by the lodestone. The Adamants were known also as the "Enchanted Breakers." No doubt the story was invented to explain many mysterious disappearances. At all

events the wooden pegs give a ship long life, for there is nothing to corrode.

Most seaworthy of all dhows are the large *baggalas* from Muscat and the Persian Gulf, with their high, square sterns – often richly carved – and shapely prows. A *baggala* may be 100 feet in length with a beam of 30 feet. Tiller, cleats, bulwarks, spars, everything about her is massive. She has a double skin, like the famous Norwegian life-boat design, the space between inner and outer planking being filled with a lime and coral mixture to make her thoroughly watertight. Fish oil or porpoise fat serves as paint. The heavy rudder might have been transhipped from the Ark.

Yet the dhow has lines that capture a sailor's eye. She may appear to ride low in the water amidships, but she

has a powerful bow, and a stern that will not be swamped when she runs before a gale. The deep keel gives her a grip on the water, so that she can be driven to windward and claw off a lee shore. Her keel is of such stout timber, too, that she can scrape over a coral reef or pound heavily on sand without causing serious damage.

A type of dhow that has aroused wide interest is the *mtepe*. I have seen them at Zanzibar, but I believe they are now built only at Pate Island in the Lamu group. These are the sewn boats, in which the planks are held firmly together with coco-nut fibre. A certain amount of elasticity is created by this ingenious device, and the *mtepe* stands up remarkably well to the hammerblows of the sea. You can distinguish a *mtepe* by her square rig, long projecting stern and a bow like the

head of a camel, throwing up white spray on an emerald sea. They sail so fast that the Zanzibaris call them *kama manowari* – the man-o’-war boats.

The odours of past cargoes cling to all these hard-bitten wanderers of the Indian Ocean. They are “tramps” in the true sense of the word, for most of them sail without knowing where the next freight will be lifted. I saw a Maldiv dhow arrive in Colombo reeking of dried fish. In her holds, too, were coco-nut products, tortoise-shell; and I was told she would carry rice and bicycles back to the islands.

When you see any battered, ocean-going dhow you may be fairly sure that frankincense and skins, coffee and ivory, carpets and dates, cloth and sponges have all been heaped in her bilges at some time or other to cross the seas covered with tarpaulins. The

passengers sit on top of the lot with their baggage. It is transportation reduced to simple terms. Cooking is done in an iron box half-filled with sand. Often a flying-fish drops on deck at night, drawn by lanterns. Occasionally a turtle asleep on the surface is captured. Oranges help to keep the scurvy away. As a luxury there is the Arabian melted butter called *samn*, and always there is coffee.

If supplies run short (or, one suspects, when there is still ample food in the locker) the dhow skipper does not hesitate about holding up a liner. Thousands of passengers bound for India or Australia must recall those little dramas of mid-ocean – the dhow becalmed and flying a distress signal, the liner sending casks of fresh water and sacks of provisions across to her in accordance with the unwritten law

of the sea. Most captains, however, have been forced to refuse pleas for tobacco. This is not a form of begging to be encouraged.

Sea routine on board the dhows is a lazy affair of tiller and look out. There are no decks to scrub, no brass work to polish. Each morning before dawn comes the call to prayer. "Allaho Akobar!" In the evening, when the sun touches the sea-rim, the skipper becomes priest again. All on board face Mecca, dropping to the deck with their foreheads touching the wood, kneeling until the last words are chanted. "Peace and the mercy of Allah be on you!"

The Indian Ocean is sprinkled generously with groups of coral islets. Fishing stations have been established on dozens of atolls, copra is produced on the larger islands. These calm

lagoons seldom see the keel of a steamer. The dhows are not too proud to visit tiny outposts in search of cargoes.

Hundreds of dhows still afloat once carried slaves. Indeed, there are forms of domestic slavery which have not yet been stamped out. Dhows have been chased by British sloops in the Red Sea in recent years. The trade is so dangerous today, however, that the dhow skipper prefers a smaller, safer profit. When he does wish to gamble he fits out for a pearling cruise.

You can identify a pearling dhow by the smell of long-decayed oysters. Arabs and deep-chested, black skinned Somalis go as divers. The only apparatus carried is a primitive form of "submarine eye" – a glass bowl, or a funnel with a glass bottom, pressed below the surface. Thus the precious

beds of oyster-shell are found. If sharks keep away and no dreaded octopus appears, if a man is not trapped by a giant clam, and if the oyster-shell is rich, the naked divers may sail back rejoicing to the pearl market of Zanzibar.

Malindi waterfront at Zanzibar, and the tortuous, narrow streets and coffee houses of the bazaar form a memorable scene during the north-east monsoon. Then the crews of dhows from distant coasts arrive to spend their pay recklessly, just as the sailormen of other nations do at the end of a hard passage.

The dhow, as I have said, does not always survive the dangers of the Indian Ocean. One of the strangest disasters occurred only a few years ago, when a dhow left Zanzibar for the Gulf of Cutch with thirty-seven people

on board, mainly Arabs and Indians. They were sailing well in fair weather one night when a shock was felt below the water-line. The dhow began to leak and a hurried search revealed the long, serrated snout of a saw-fish protruding through the planking. These saw-fish are really a type of shark, running up to 14 feet in length and weighing as much as 800 lb. They strike with tremendous violence, and many a small boat has been sunk by saw-fish in tropical waters.

In ramming the dhow the fish had found a weak spot and water was pouring in. Crew and passengers toiled all night to shore up the rotten timbers and plug the leak. It was useless. Towards morning the skipper ran for the Lamu Islands and left the dhow on a reef to avoid foundering. No lives were lost, but the dhow became a total

wreck.

Yet the old dhow trade flourishes in spite of the known and unknown perils of the sea. These Arabs sail on as though turbines and marine motors had never been invented. I see them now, the monsoon droning in the bellying sail, brown sailors singing and beating their drums, an old man with a green turban and a thin beard crouched at the tiller. These are the Vikings of the East, indeed, sailing boldly to adventure over the horizon.

CHAPTER 19

ZANZIBAR

AFTER Thirteen Years I Returned To Zanzibar wondering whether I had chosen my voyage wisely. In those years I had seen other islands in distant seas. But always I remembered a Zanzibar that had penetrated youthful senses, a Zanzibar that remained pleasantly on the screen of the mind, like a first love affair.

And now I was going back, I breathed again the fragrance of the cloves that greets travellers far out on the ocean. Would Zanzibar have lost its charm for me?

Strange to say, Zanzibar held no disillusion on that hot golden morning when I beheld the waterfront once more. There was the spire of the old palace, and to right and left the coral

houses cheek by jowl, still with their air of secrecy and the weather-scarred look of experience that comes of staring down calmly on the unfolding of an island story.

As I wandered through streets in which the overhanging balconies were so close that people on opposite sides might have clasped hands, as I followed my guide through the maze, the years dropped away, and I knew the spell of Zanzibar was stronger than ever. Casual visitors have landed on this spice island for a morning and then sent to the ship for their baggage. Those who have gone to stay for a week have forgotten the life in that other world which seemed so important, and have stayed on and on in Zanzibar. It is the one place in the world to which a tired traveller may return without disappointment. Electri-

city and motor-cars cannot change it. The old magic clings to houses that have seen invasions and hand-to-hand fighting in the streets; houses that watched the buccaneers pass, the shackled slaves, and the caravans of Livingstone and Stanley. Sometimes the scene may belong to the period in which we live; but gaze a little deeper and you will see the old swash-buckling Zanzibar.

Under the red flag of the Sultan of Zanzibar you will find the most cosmopolitan island crowd in the world. I do not believe there is another place where white, black, brown and yellow humanity have gathered in such array of nations.

Swahilis, Arabs and Indians are the strong sections in Zanzibar's 120,000 population, and there is no difficulty about identifying them. The African



A clove plantation in Pemba.

coast native all the way from Somaliland to Mozambique is a Swahili. In

Zanzibar he is more of a mixture, perhaps, than on the mainland; slaves from far corners of Africa were brought to this melting-pot.

The description given by Marco Polo fits many a Swahili today. "Their mouths are so large, their noses so turned up, their lips so thick, their eyes so big and bloodshot, that they look like devils." Curly-headed, beardless, negroid people are these Swahilis, speaking a pleasant sounding language. If you know Swahili you can travel almost across Africa – like the caravans that spread this lingua franca – and seldom will you be at a loss. The Swahili language has borrowed from French, Portuguese, Arabic and one may recognise English words strangely adapted. Thus the word expressing great approval is "fursklasi," a present is "krissmass,"



A coconut grove in Pemba.

while the traveller desiring a bath shouts "bafu."

Imitation comes naturally to the Swahili. He will wear a European suit if he can wheedle one from his master, or the white' robes of the Arab. Many Swahili women copy the Arab fashion of the black cotton cloak, leaving their faces uncovered. They are Moslems, but the men will cheerfully accept any intoxicant offered to them. All of them love music and dancing. ("When you play the flute in Zanzibar all Africa, as far as the Lakes, dances.") These tastes do not always blend happily with hard work. Nevertheless, many a Swahili has served as "seedie boy" in His Majesty's ships, returning proudly to his beloved Zanzibar as surely as the British seaman returns to his home port.

Cross the creek to Ngambo, a large village of limestone huts with palm-leaf roofs, and you are in the Swahili

quarter of Zanzibar. They say that shark and frangipane are the twin odours of the island, but in these streets the shark smell overpowers all others. There is a whiff of coffee, sold at the rate of three small cups for a farthing by picturesque ruffians who carry their pots with hot charcoal and clink, clink, clink as they seek customers. A nice helping of dried shark and a few bananas or dates bring the cost of a meal up to a penny. At night the drums sound through these streets, and the women sway by firelight to the monotonous rhythm of the "lelemama" dance.

Arabs are found in all grades of Zanzibar society. There are the Oman Arabs, tall and serene men who own land and rank as aristocrats. With their fine features, black-dyed beards, and light skins, they are the Arabs of the



White-gowned Swahilis stride past the Zanzibar fruit market.

story books – courteous hosts offering rich gifts on occasion, living in coral marisions with barred windows, proprietors of unseen harems. On ordinary days the Arab walks abroad in white cotton cap, the long white garment called “kanzu “and sandals. But he often appears in more gorgeous robes, with a brilliant turban and a magnificent dagger in his silver belt.

The lower classes work in Zanzibar as stevedores, basket-makers, water-carriers. A blind Arab beggar goes to the homes of the wealthy and recites poetry. Veiled Arab women go shopping in the bazaar. (“It is wrong to lie – except to one’s wife,” say the coast Arabs.) Silk and gold are the outward signs of prosperity among these people, the old conquerors of Zanzibar. Nearly all the sects and castes of India are represented among

Zanzibar’s teeming Indian population. Hindu and Mohammedan are rivals in trade, living peacefully side by side. There are well-to-do Parsees, smart Goans cooking in the European households, thin-legged coolies toiling with their burdens.

Cingalese jewellers, craftsmen who beautify tortoise shell and ivory, ebony and gold, live apart in a street of their own. In the Malindi quarter, dark strangers from the Persian Gulf spend their rupees, drink and riot as sailor-men will, before staggering back to the dhows. During a short walk on shore the traveller mingles with Syrians and Congolese, Abyssinians and Nubians, Japanese and Chinese, Somalis, coloured men from South Africa, Mauritians, Seychelles islanders, Madagascans, Masai, Turks and the mysterious black Comorro people who



Where the people of Zanzibar buy their vegetables.

like to call themselves Arabs, but who are Bantu in speech.

Similarly all the nations of Europe are found among the few hundred white residents. When you make a telephone call in Zanzibar you do not ask for a number just "Mr. Smith, please." If there is no reply the operator says: "Not at home – they are usually at the club just now. I'll try there."

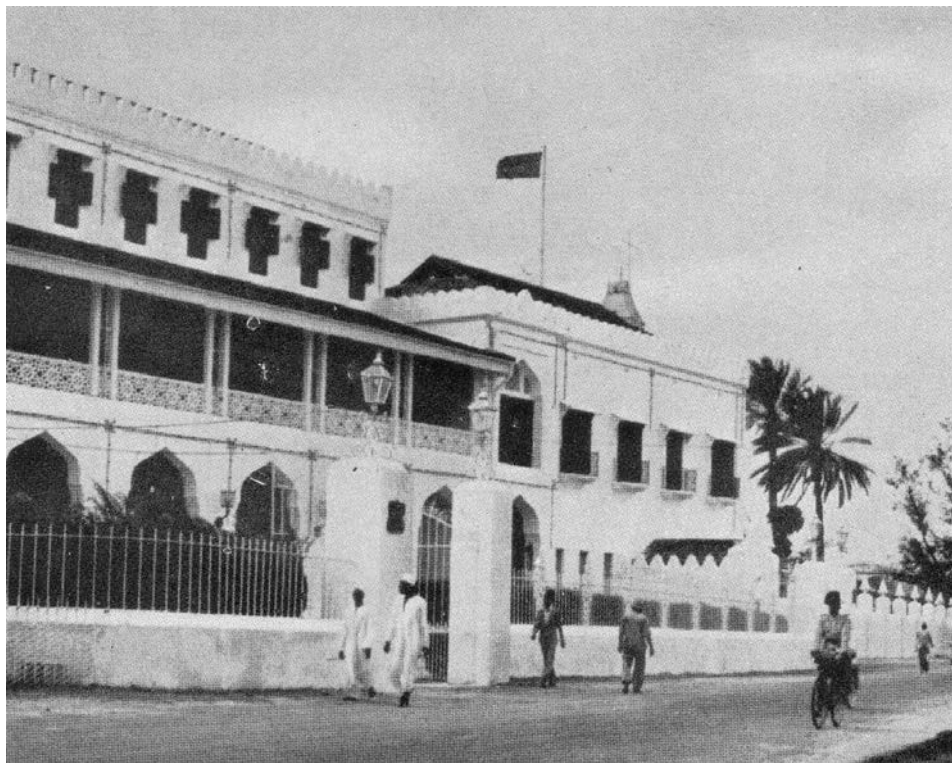
A small community indeed, but a comfortable one. There is a ship every day, so that Zanzibar remains in close touch with the world. Electric light wires now run down the Arabian Nights setting of the streets. Polo, golf and tennis pass the time, though Zanzibar is more famous for its bathing beaches and its fishing. For a hundred rupees a month the white resident may occupy a huge Arab house with coco-nut trees in the

garden and a front door like the entrance to a fortress.

2

When I was last in Zanzibar the streets were decorated for the silver jubilee of the Sultan, His Highness Sir Khalifa bin Harab. There was a State "Baraza," the Sultan received the insignia of the G.C.M.G., and in turn bestowed Brilliant Stars of Zanzibar and medals. Salutes of guns, receptions and dances marked the twenty-fifth year of a peaceful reign.

Amid all the gaiety there was one vivid incident only to remind an onlooker with a memory of the real story of the old Sultans of Zanzibar. That moment came when the Sultan drove through the bazaars in his open carriage and passed thousands of Arabs from Muscat, seafarers who had



The sultan's palace on the Zanzibar waterfront.

sailed to Zanzibar in dhows, and exiles working in the clove plantations. Muscat is the home of the Sultans, and these men had massed in thousands to show their loyalty. Each man carried a sword and knew the trick of holding it aloft and twisting it so that the sun caught the blade. And as the Sultan passed by, 5000 swords flashed and scintillated in the sun.

There for a moment was the old Zanzibar. The Arabs from Muscat drove out the Portuguese long ago, and reconquered the island early last century. More than a hundred years ago the first Sultan moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar, and made the town his stronghold and the island metropolis of East Africa. That was Seyyid Said bin Sultan, founder of the great clove industry, the ruler who sent a 50-gun barque to England with

presents for Queen Victoria. A fine gesture, and fine presents, too – pearl necklaces, emeralds, cashmere shawls, bottles of perfume and four horses.

Seyyid Said was the most powerful slave trader of his day, and his presents must have been received with some suspicion. The cunning Sultan, realising that he could not defy British opinion indefinitely, signed an agreement restricting slavery to his own territory. He then, proceeded to deal in “black ivory” very much as he had done before. His operations were aided by one of the strongest fleets ever owned by an Eastern potentate. The Sultan’s naval squadron consisted of one line of battle ship, four corvettes, two sloops and seven brigs; and it is said that the Sultan himself could handle his vessels as skilfully as any master mariner.

The fleet kept Seyyid Said in touch with the capitals of the world. A generous man when he felt the need of diplomacy, he sent a large frigate to William IV of England. The gift was accepted and became H.M.S. *Imam* of the Royal Navy.

Seyyid Said was the outstanding character in the line of Zanzibar Sultans, and he lived in the grand manner. At one of his palaces he kept a thousand servants. As he left 112 children, his harem must also have been vast. Among his wives was a beautiful Persian who arrived on the island with an impressive staff, including an executioner. Only in 1890 were public executions by the curved Arab sword abolished in Zanzibar.

The naval tradition has never died out. Seyyid Khalid, who attempted to usurp the throne in 1896, controlled

the sole survivor of the Zanzibar Navy, the armed corvette Glasgow. The British representative delivered an ultimatum. Khalid, who had seized the palace, refused to leave and ordered the Glasgow to open fire on the British men-o'-war in the anchorage. Thus a strange, forgotten action was fought. It lasted only a few minutes. The Glasgow was holed and sank, the palace was bombarded, Seyyid Khalid escaped to German territory at Dar-es-Salaam. A year later slavery became illegal.

Even today the Sultan maintains a pair of smart white steamers and a "war dhow" which lies, for political reasons, off the neighbouring island of Pemba.

When the present Sultan sends out printed invitations to a dance at his palace, his steamer Cupid picks up



A narrow street in the bazaar at Zanzibar.

guests from as far away as Dar-es-Salaam and brings them to the island. Out to the Cupid comes the Sultan's barge, a richly-canopied motor-launch. The guests disembark – men in the white mess jackets of the tropics, women in gay wraps. They stroll from the landing place towards the coral facade of the palace. Next to the palace is the Bet-el-Ajaib, the "House of Wonders" where the old Sultans lived – the building that has seen international intrigues, that sheltered enormous harems, and that finally was shelled.

The guests pass on through a carved doorway to be received by the Sultan's secretary, a British official. Wealthy Arab merchants arrive in rickshaws decorated with gold and silver, in carriages and motor cars.

The hall is perfumed with attar of

roses. At nine o'clock a mellow gong is heard. There are tables set in European fashion, and rugs worth a fortune on which the Eastern people gravely rest. While English courses are served at the tables, great silver dishes of curry and rice, scores of relishes and flavourings, and cut-glass bowls of mangoes are set down before the wise old men on the rugs. Finally the Sultan's famous coffee is handed round and soon afterwards the dancing begins.

Under the domed ceiling the dance hall shines with ancient golden candelabras. Along the walls are doors gleaming with patterned brass. The orchestra of Askaris opens with a waltz; twenty natives wearing red fezzes, shorts, red sashes and blue puttees playing brass instruments with all the natural rhythm of the African.

The Sultan in turban, robes of gold and pointed slippers, does not dance. With his son Ali, who wears conventional evening clothes, he stands apart, benign and dignified. The Sultana, forbidden by custom to appear in the sight of men, gazes down on the dancers from a screened balcony.

After the dance, long after midnight, little parties seek the quiet beaches where blue-gold fire-flies hover among the palms. This, too, is the old Zanzibar – the island that sometimes sleeps but never dies. Night covers modern progress, and the shadows are those that Tippu Tub knew, and Livingstone and Stanley, and all the bygone Sultans whose deeds have become legends.

Adventurers of many nations have added their escapades to the wild story

of Zanzibar. Sometimes the island is as quiet as an English village. Then the reckless humourist, the high-spirited white exile on the spree, plays strange games in the alleys of the bazaar.

I travelled to Zanzibar once with a man who had spent five years there and knew every turn in the maze of coral houses. He talked of Zanzibar nights he had known....

Nights when he and four friends met in one of the bars in Portuguese Street, drank for inspiration a whisky which had no name and cost only 4s. a bottle, and planned the evening's entertainment.

Each man had a police askari (native constable) assigned to him by the commanding officer – an island custom of the period which ensured a

safe return home. The precaution was taken because one member of the party, who always slept on the beach on such nights, had been carried out with the tide and almost drowned.

After the sundowners the party would dine – curry and rice and beer, and occasionally a glass of *pombe*, the famous coco-nut intoxicant that kicks like a camel. Then a few rounds of stout, with *creme cacao*, and the conspirators would set out in search of mischief.

There is a milestone in Zanzibar which tells the homesick how far the island lies from London – 8064 miles. Close at hand are the cannon left by early navigators, embossed with the Portuguese coat of arms. Stealthily the wicked companions rammed gunpowder into muzzles that had not known a charge for centuries. Trains were laid

and touched off, the quiet Zanzibar night reverberated with drunken salutes.

It was a promising start, worthy of celebration. The friends chose an hotel where one of their number could obtain credit. Refreshment was taken during a game of billiards, played with umbrellas, canes and shark sticks. Thus fortified, they rolled out into the starlight, seized bicycles and raced through bazaar streets, only 3 feet wide, with a merry jingling of bells.

The ride brought them to the fruit market, where bullock-carts from the country were arriving for the next day's business. Strong men of the party threw a few bullocks by the horns. Then leaving the bicycles and taking donkeys, the five tough men rode on.

Halting in Portuguese Street they gathered in the shadows of the tall Arab houses to discuss an idea. A chain was found and shackled to other chains. They passed it down the street, through the heavy ring in each massive door, hauled taut, and made the ends fast. They were not there in the morning when the barricaded residents climbed out of the windows to clear their front doors.

From Portuguese Street they galloped down to the waterfront at the request of one member who was building a jetty. His reasons were obscure, and his friends were puzzled when they saw him stripping and winding a length of chain round his waist. "Going down to inspect the foundations," muttered the jetty builder; and before they could stop him he had gone. Fortunately he kept his wits

about him, unwound the chain in time, and reappeared shouting for a drink.

In the dawn, after ham and eggs at the Japanese Cafe, the friends parted with many loud protestations of goodwill. The tired police escorts were free at last. "Great days – wonderful times," the man from Zanzibar declared, with a glance at his impressive waist-line and a sigh for his riotous youth.

Long before those days Zanzibar attracted men who were ready to tackle any job offering a profit, regardless of consequences. A German adventurer years ago arranged to build the ruling Sultan a palace. It looked all right for a time; but the rains came before the roof was on, and the whole Oriental pile collapsed like a sandheap.

A second attempt by the same bold

German was more successful. The building stood serenely until the Sultan defied a British fleet. In the bombardment the palace suffered again.

About thirty years ago an American company approached the Sultan with a railway scheme. The enterprising Americans offered to fit the palace with electric light and fans if he granted the concession, and, thus tempted, the Sultan agreed.

It must have been one of the shortest railways in the world. The line started in Zanzibar Town near the palace, dived headlong into the bazaar, twisted and turned ruthlessly through teeming alley-ways, emerged into the open, and ended 7 miles away at a clove plantation bearing the impossible name of Bububu. A general manager and assistant general

manager were appointed, both at high salaries. Each day the train of open vans carried an excited company of labourers to work among the cloves, puffing back triumphantly in the evening.

When white residents wished to make the railway journey to Bububu – for experience rather than urgent business reasons – notice was given the day before. Chairs were then placed in a special van, and the train waited, often for an hour or two, while the important travellers made their unhurried way to the station.

Once a Zanzibar railway official on leave in England applied to a great British railway company for the free pass often issued as an act of courtesy to visiting railway executives. The pass was granted, and the official, in a letter of thanks, assured his hosts that

they would be granted the same privilege in Zanzibar!

Zanzibar's only railway suffered heavily when motorbuses appeared on the island roads. In 1928 the queer little enterprise closed down, and I do not suppose the island will ever see the panting engines and packed vans filling the lanes of the bazaars again.

Nearly a century ago Queen Victoria presented Seyyid Said, the Sultan, with a State carriage – a magnificent turn-out which appealed greatly to the ruler. Unhappily there were no roads in Zanzibar suitable for such a carriage. Moreover, the State carriage reached the island in parts and even the most cunning of the Sultan's craftsmen were incapable of assembling it. The Sultan solved the problem by sending the carriage on to the Nizam of Hyderabad, and for

many years the gorgeous present was the wonder of the Indian country-side.

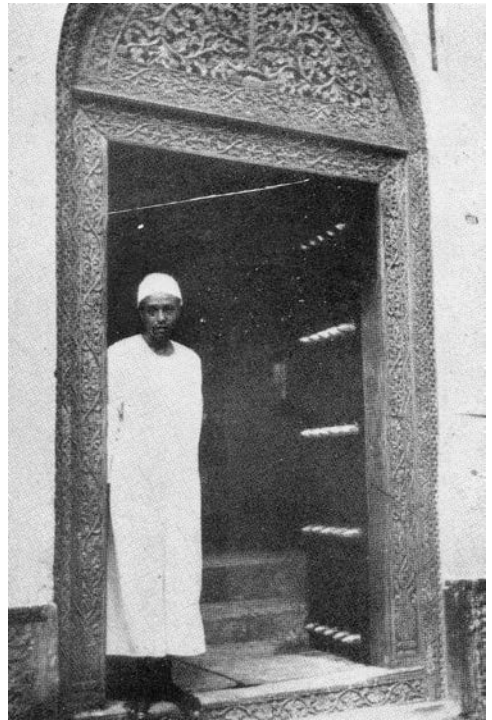
Today the Sultan of Zanzibar drives among his delighted subjects in a motor-car. The town has gained electric light, medical services and a safe water supply without losing its medieval charm. "Bado," meaning "not yet," is still the inevitable Swahili reply to polite inquiries as to whether a job of work has been done. Zanzibar, indeed, possesses an atmosphere like no other island town in the world, a slightly disreputable air that fits neatly into its swashbuckling past and does not repel the traveller. A great many odd characters, unsung heroes and long-remembered ruffians have built up Zanzibar's queer reputation.

"Great days – wonderful times."

Every traveller who has ever roamed the streets of Zanzibar must have paused to admire the massive doorways in the old coral houses. These doors, with their rich carving and beauty, grip the imagination and fascinate the eye. Now, by order of His Highness the Sultan, no door may be torn from a building and taken from the island.

A wise law, for Zanzibar would otherwise have lost much of that medieval atmosphere which is its greatest charm. Not every traveller realises the meaning of the carved doors, the symbolism of their ancient designs. Probably most of the island people themselves see nothing more than decoration in these patterns.

Nevertheless, a main doorway of the old type in Zanzibar was shaped to give the Arab household prosperity



A Zanzibar doorway with heavy brass spikes to resist elephants.

and protection. The carved door and

frame were placed in position first, the building came afterwards. Thus no evil spirit could enter while the coral walls were being raised.

All the carved doors have certain designs (however much they may have degenerated) in common. The lotus, the rosette and the frankincense tree or date-palm – one or all of these appears in the genuine old carvings. A fish, or some derivative in the form of a pineapple or grenade, may be found on practically every door.

Frankincense stood for water. All the other symbols suggested fertility. Probably they came from Egypt and Assyria, where the Fish Goddess was worshipped.

Wavy lines represent water. A carved chain round the door gives the idea of security, and now replaces the real

chain used when Zanzibar was a slave market and pirate stronghold.

The great brass spikes and bosses were no doubt derived from India, where doors were fitted to resist a charging elephant. Men from India, Arabia and the Red Sea ports were sailing down with the monsoon to Zanzibar nearly two thousand years ago; and all these foreign influences may be traced in the doors of the coral city.

The craftsmen who made these wonderful doors were Arabs and Swahilis. It was a dead art before the Great War, and though Indians have attempted to carry on the tradition the workmanship is inferior. An Indian door may be recognised immediately by the arched tops. The old doors were invariably rectangular.

I was shown the monograms of

famous Zanzibar Arabs forming part of the carving. Most elaborate of all were the doors in the Bet-el-Ajaib ("House of Wonders"), formerly a Sultan's palace. The wood was covered with texts from the Koran, gilded on a green background. This is the largest building in Zanzibar, and the doors are worthy of it. Nowadays a lift carries the traveller up to the roof, and the rooms are used as Government offices. I wonder how many skeletons of murdered slaves lie below the doors of the palace? It was the ghastly custom to sacrifice a slave when a door was placed in position. Now there are ghost legends everywhere on the island, as well there may be.

Zanzibar doors are fitted with strong padlocks at the base, between the carved lions crouching on each side of the frames. Some of the best examples

have a carved centre-post. I saw a few of these grand old doors painted over by Indians occupying the houses. Most Zanzibar people show better taste, however, and a door in a house occupied by a white resident is always regarded with pride and maintained as it should be.

When I last called at Zanzibar I was offered a door for £35 – an obvious, recent imitation of an Arab door. As I have said, the genuine old-fashioned article cannot be legally exported; though I have heard tales of doors smuggled away at night and hoisted on board steamers offshore. The ingenuity of the Indian is remarkable when there is money to be made.

The men who carved doors made fine chests, too – the famous Zanzibar chests which are now so hard to find. Late last century a splendid chest, with

heavy brass decorations, could be purchased for 40s. Today you would be lucky to secure a similar chest at eight times that price. Arab women used these chests for their jewels. There was always a secret compartment, and a bell that rang in the lock when the key was turned. I was invited to find the secret drawer, and failed. Even a customs man, I believe, would have been baffled. The owner of the chest pulled out the partition between two drawers; and attached to it was a cunning, hidden tray that must have held the pearl necklaces and gems of a bygone harem.

You may carry off these old-time chests if you can persuade the Arabs to sell them. But the great doors remain, as indeed they should, to speak in the language of symbols and remind all who pass of the craftsmen who have

vanished and the Zanzibar days that have gone with them.

5

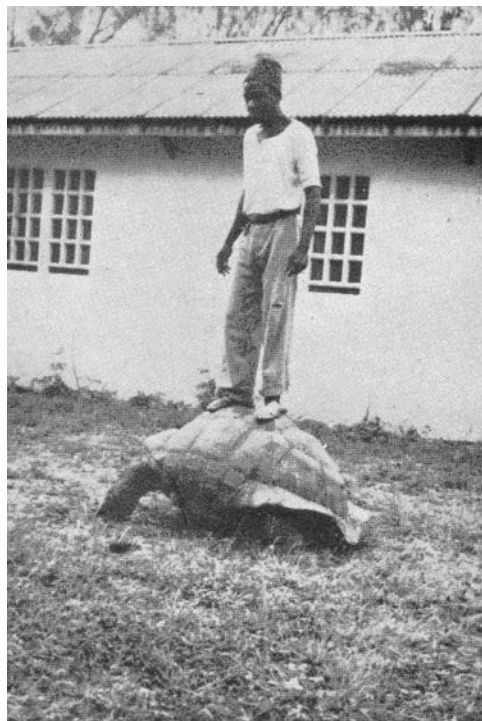
Zanzibar grips so firmly that few travellers have time to explore the islets lying off the main island. Yet each of these weird little fragments of the Sultan's territory possesses an atmosphere of its own, a story of queer events or swashbuckling drama.

During a recent visit to Zanzibar I left the vivid life of the town reluctantly, hired a motor-launch and thus set foot on several of the little-known islets. I did not regret the effort.

Prison Island, a few miles from the Zanzibar waterfront, was the first coral rock at which I touched. As I waded up to the sandy beach a Swahili native came rushing down to meet me. "Sir, your permit," he demanded.

As I had overlooked this formality I strode on with the man running, almost weeping, at my side. "Sir, I beg you to leave this island. See the notice-board, sir. It is forbidden to land without a permit."

In this disturbing fashion I started my ramble round Prison Island. I saw the turtle pool, with many a luxurious plate of soup swimming lazily in the shadows. There was an aged tortoise, brought from the Seychelles, no doubt, grazing peacefully in the bush. The Swahili stopped his pleading for a while to stand on the centenarian's great shell. Small gazelle roamed in the little jungle of the island. I skirted the pits from which the coral was taken for the first buildings in Dar-es-Salaam on the mainland 45 miles away. I walked through the double-storied prison which gave the island its



The ancient tortoise on Prison Island.

present name. For some reason the prison was never occupied, though the

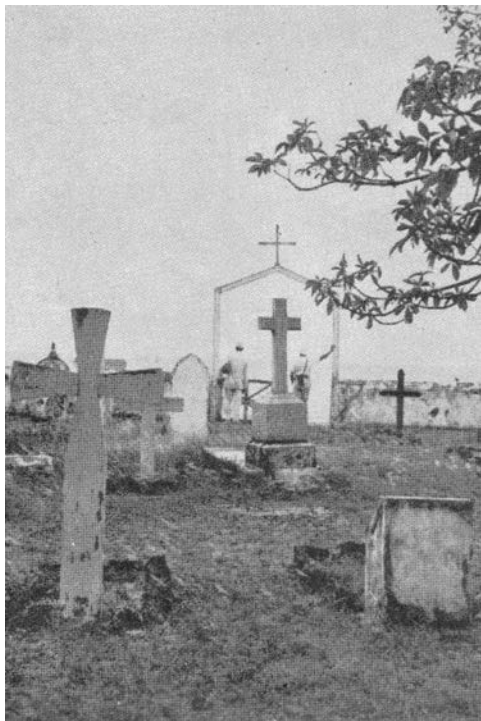
island has been used as a quarantine station for smallpox victims on several occasions. On the chart, the island appears as Chango – 20 feet high, half a mile in length. An Arab owned it in the old days and punished disobedient slaves by marooning them there. Then General Mathews, a former commander of the Sultan's troops, purchased it. The island is now Government property, and several bungalows have been built for the use of officials and visitors in search of a quiet island holiday.

A marvellous spot is Prison Island for that purpose, in spite of the grim name. There is an abundance of fish. Fowls are available, and coco-nuts and fruit may be plucked. If I hired the bungalow I should certainly poach a turtle from the pool. I shall long remember swimming in that

transparent water while the guardian of the island moaned his protests.

Prison Island has long been the favourite picnic resort of white residents of Zanzibar, and a retreat for honeymoon couples. Once there was a wedding attended by the officers of a man-o'-war in Zanzibar harbour. When the young couple departed for Prison Island that evening they found themselves in the strong beam of a searchlight that did not waver from the bungalow until the dawn. Nevertheless, the island is one of those forgotten fragments of a busy world where many a tired soul has found rest and refreshment. In future it will be my dream of a languorous tropic isle, all the more alluring because it is so close to Zanzibar.

Last century there was a Tree Island close to Prison Island, and coco-nut



In the cemetery on Grave Island.

palms bowed to the monsoons above the sparkling sea. Rain and wave

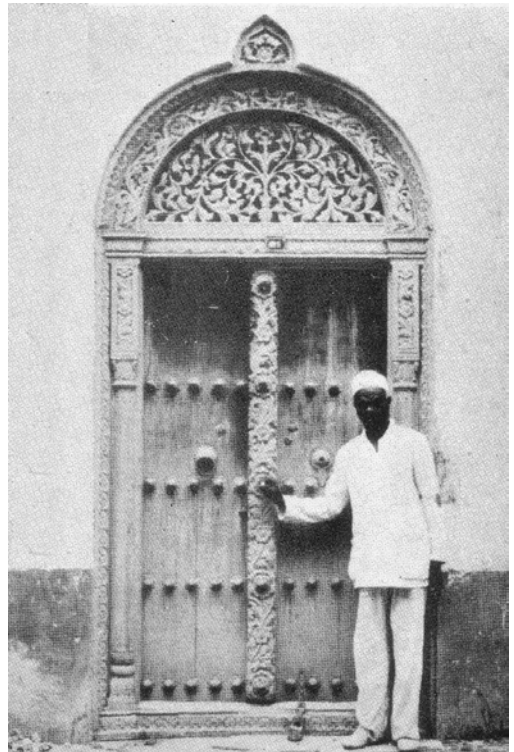
action eroded and undercut the islet, so that today there is nothing to be seen but a gleam of white sand on a coral reef. The same process is at work on Bat (or Kepandiko) Island, which I visited; but this little, uninhabited place still rears its tangle of heavy bush above the surface. It is the home of pythons and hermit crabs, and the flying foxes that swoop towards Zanzibar town in the evening to feed.

Grave Island, once known as Chapwani, and also as French Island, has long been reserved by the Sultans of Zanzibar as a cemetery for English people. There I read the inscriptions on tombstones of Royal Navy men who fell in fights with the slavers – fights that occurred within living memory. There, too, I saw the memorial to twenty-four seamen and marines of H.M.S. Pegasus, killed in

1914 when the old cruiser was surprised and sunk by the German cruiser Yonigsberg. Every year the white residents of Zanzibar lay wreaths on this grave, and every British man-o'war calling there sends men to Grave Island to keep the little plot ship-shape.

On the beach at Grave Island I noticed scraps of pumice stone, which puzzled me at the time. Later I was told by a geologist that this volcanic flotsam was undoubtedly a relic of the great Krakatoa eruption fifty years ago. The pumice took three years to drift across the Indian Ocean, then all the Zanzibar beaches were littered with it, and some still remains.

One island guarding the Zanzibar anchorage was ceded to a cable company many years ago. This is Bayeye, a low island of coco-nut trees



George Washington, the guide, reveals one of the famous carved doorways of Zanzibar.

where the deep sea cables come on shore. Beyond that is a reef where the hull of the Eastern Telegraph ship Great Northern, lost in 1909, looms up like a fortress in tropic seas.

Chumbe Island, eight miles from the town, is now connected by telephone cable with the mainland. There is a reason. The island lighthouse was attacked by the crew of a pirate dhow only a few years before the Great War, the keepers were wounded and the lighthouse stores ransacked.

Most mysterious of all the off lying islands is Tumbatu, a narrow, rocky, tree-covered place five miles in length and situated on the north-west coast of Zanzibar. The people of Tumbatu, about three thousand souls, are entirely different from the races found in Zanzibar itself. They represent the nearest approach to the aboriginal

Zanzibaris, though centuries ago they mixed with Persian invaders and still claim direct descent from the Kings of Shiraz.

The proud inhabitants of Tumbatu have the reputation of being the finest sailors and local pilots on the East African coast. They keep to themselves and they will allow no Indian storekeepers to settle among them. No water is found on Tumbatu, so that this and many other supplies must be brought from Mkokotoni, opposite the island.

There is no doubt that Tumbatu formed an independent State during the time of the Persian occupation of Zanzibar. Ancient ruins of distinct Persian type, built between A.D. 900 and 1200, show where this important city of the Zenj Empire once stood on Tumbatu. By the sixteenth century it

had been abandoned, and the modern Persian-Africans of Tumbatu live in three villages.

The Mafia Island group, to the south of Zanzibar, were ports of call for many a buccaneer and pirate crew. Chinese junks traded with the islands during the eighth and ninth centuries, judging by the coins dug up on Mafia. (The theory is supported by the fact that the first Portuguese navigators met Chinese junks in East African waters.) Then came the Arabs and also, according to legend, people in war-canoes from Madagascar. Germany took possession in 1890, and a British expeditionary force captured the islands in 1915 after a short bombardment. Mafia then became the base for sea and air operations against the Konigsberg in the Rufiji Delta.

A Mafia island legend relates one of

the most dramatic stories of revenge I have heard. It concerns a sunken village which can still be seen beneath the clear green water off Ras Kisimani at the north-east corner of Mafia. They say that the people of this village built a large dhow and invited the inhabitants of the neighbouring island of Juani to attend the launching ceremony. During the feast a number of children of Juani were taken by force and tied up on the beach. The dhow was then launched over this human sacrifice.

For eight years the Juani islanders brooded over this wrong, the crime that had been almost forgotten on Mafia. Then they asked the Mafia people to a wedding. The unsuspecting guests were shown into a room, specially prepared for them, with thick walls. Food and drink were served,

and one by one the hosts slipped away, leaving the merry Mafia islanders to enjoy the rich entertainment. Their skeletons are still in that room, for the Juani people bricked up the entrances. A month after that ghastly settlement, so they say, a tidal wave swept the village of Ras Kisimani into the sea.

Mafia is one of the many islands on which Captain Kidd is said to have buried his missing hoard. And if the natives are to be believed, the treasure is no longer there. One morning at sunrise, they declare, a party of armed men came on shore, studied a document, made measurements from a large baobab tree, excavated a large chest filled with gold, and carried it off to their ship.

Zanzibar has a sister island 23 miles to the north. This is Pemba, named by the early Arab explorers "Al Huthera," the

Green Island. Green and beautiful it may be, but Pemba is looked upon even now as Africa's university of witchcraft. In other parts of Africa devils are feared, but among the Pemba people devils are friends.

The greatest magician of all, a man who confers evil degrees, as it were, on lesser craftsmen in East Africa, lives in the remote bush of Pemba. It is said that before a young witch-doctor can be admitted to the dark circle he must poison a relative without being detected.

Right up to the end of last century the creeks of Pemba gave shelter to slave traders. White wooden crosses in the bush mark the graves of British seamen who were killed in hand-to-hand encounters with the slavers, or who went down in the deadly malarious climate. The deaths of Captain Brown-

rigg R.N., and a young lieutenant named Cooper, in desperate engagements with slave dhows are well remembered by old inhabitants of Pemba. The Sultan sent a small army to capture the Arabs who attacked Captain Brownrigg and his men. Two of the villains were brought to Zanzibar and found guilty. A public execution was demanded by the British Consul-General. This the Sultan refused, as Mohammedan law declares that the murderer of a Christian by a Moslem cannot be punished by death. So the murderers went to prison for life.

These fierce days do not seem far distant along the shores of Pemba. Almost every place-name recalls some blood-stained page in the island's story. It was the custom of the slavers to throw their human cargoes over-

board when they were in danger of search by a man-o'-war. Thus there is a village in a mangrove swamp named Chake-Chake – “every man for himself.” Many a slave perished in that creek.

Members of a British military survey party sent to map the interior of Pemba some years ago were puzzled by a loud whistling noise repeated every night. On windless nights it rose to a screech and continued for hours. No bird or animal, the officers decided, could have produced such a note, and the natives denied all knowledge of it. No doubt the queer sound was the work of witch-doctors. White officials had previously reported similar attempts by the natives to scare them away.

Chinese junks, Portuguese caravels, slave dhows and the wooden gunboats

that chased them – all these have departed from the waters of Zanzibar. But in the Sultan's town and the islands the atmosphere of adventure clings to the old coral buildings. In few places has law and order been established in such lawless surroundings. Only when I saw the air-mail plane over Zanzibar could I fully realise that the days of slaves and pirates were over, and that a thin covering of civilisation had come like the shadow of metal wings.

INDEX

The index below is as it was in the original paper book but in this e-book the page numbers have all changed and have therefore been removed. Otherwise the original index is left unchanged to display the authors choice and readers should use their program's search facility to locate the item.

"Abba" plant
Abu Hameb
Abyssinia
Abyssinians
(constable) Ackerman
Adventures of a Lion Family
Agulhas light
Al Huthera
Albertville

Alexander Bay
Algoa Bay
J. E. Allen
Yank Allen
the Aloe
Alsations
Andalusia
Anderson
Charles John Anderson

Angeli ers pan
Angola
Angola Boers
Angra Pequena
"One Shot" Araujo
Ark of the Covenant
Armada le Castle
Arniston
Maurice M. Aronson
Ascension Island
H.M.S. Ascension
Assouan
Auni

Auob
Auob River
Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon
Dr. Baikie
Donald Bain
Bain's Camp
Baldwin, the hunter
Hugh Chicheley Ballance
Bamangwato
Baralongs
Bardera
Barkly West
Lady Anne Barnard

John Barrow
Bastards of the Nossob
Basutoland
Bat (or Kepandiko) Island
Batawana
Bawe
Bayeye
Beaumont
Beaumont's Folly
Bechuana
Bechuanaland
Beira railway
Beira-Mashonaland railway

Belgian Congo
Berg Damaras
Berg River
Bet-el-Ajaib
Dr. Biccard
Bird Island
Birds of Ascension Island
Birkenhead
Birkenhead Rock
Blaauwberg beach
Blaauwberg strand
Black Jacob
Black Jacob Rock

Blenden Hall
Bluff lighthouse
Bombay
Bongo
Bordein
Border station
Isaac Bosman
(Two brothers, named) Brandt
Bredasdorp district
Britannia Blinder
British Museum of Natural History
Captain Brownrigg R.N.

Bububu
Buffalo River
Bukoba
Bula Matadi
Bultfontein
William Burchell
Bush telegraph
Bushmanland
Bushman hunting dog
Bushmen
Busi River
Caledon
Calvinia

Cameroons
Sir Malcolm Campbell
Camps Bay
Cap Rock
Cape Agulhas
Cape Columbine
Cape Government
Cape Guardafui
Cape Malay legend
Cape of Storms
Cape Peninsula
Cape Point
Cape Province

Cape St. Francis lighthouse
Cape-to-Bulawayo railway
Cape Town
Caprivi Strip
Cariboo
A. M. Carroll
Dr. Cathcart
Central Sorting Office in Kimberley
Lake Chad
Chake-Chake
H.M.S. Challenger
Jan Chandler

Chango
Chapman
Chapwani
Chinese
Chumbe Island
Cingalese jewellers
City of London Corporation
Clarence Bay
Coega River
Colombo
Commando
Comorro people
Conception Bay

Congo
Congo pygmies
Congo steamers
Congolese
Joseph Conrad
(Lieutenant named) Cooper
Coptic Church
Fred Cornell
cotyledon
Cunene River
Cupid
H.M.S. Daedalus
Dageraad

Miss Madeleine Dalton
Damaras
Colonel Paiva d'Andrada
Danger Point
Danger Point lighthouse
Dar-es-Salaam
Professor Raymond Dart
Charles Darwin
Dassen Island
Dassen light
Dayspring
De Beers mines
De Jonge Thomas

Theo de Klerck
Delagoa Bay
Diaz
Diaz Point lighthouse
Bartholomew Diaz
Captain Dickie
Diego Garcia
Dinteranthus
Donkerbos
Drummond
Dr. A. L. du Toit
Duiker Island
"Duiker-horings" plant

Duke of Edinburgh
Dumfudgeon
Durban
Durban Bay
Durban breakwater
Dutch East India Company
Dutoitspan
Dyer's and Geyser Islands
Edward Bohlen
Seal and Egg Island
Eighty Four (Islet)
Elephant Rock
Elephants

Emin Pasha
Empreza
Enchanted Breakers
Encyclopaedia Britannica
Mrs. Engelbrecht
Epukiro area
Etosha Pan
Euphorbias
Jacob Evertson
Eve's Needle
False Bay
False Islet
Farini

Diver Farrell
Diver W. K. Faulds
Finisterre
Fontesvilla
Richard Fowley
Major Fox
French Congo
French Hoek
French Island
French sealers
camels from Fuerteventura
Galjoen
Geology of the Cape Colony

Georgetown
Dyer's and Geyser Islands
Ghanzi
Ghanzi Pan
Ghanzi settlement
Mr. Gibbs
Gibraltar
Giraffe Lake
armed corvette Glasgow
Goans
Gobabis
Gobabis district
Goldberg

Golden Hind
Good Hope
General Gordon
Goude Buys
Gough Island
Graf Goetzen
"Grahamstown" (farm wagons)
Captain Grant
Graspan
Grave Island
Great Commissioner's Pan
Great North Road
Great Northern

Great Paternoster Point
Great Snake of the Orange River
"Great Thirst" region of the Kalahari
Great Trek wagon
Green Mountain
Green Point
Green Point lighthouse
Griqua
Piet Grobler
Groot Vloer
Groote Schuur estate
Grootkolk

Guelph
Gulf of Cutch
Halifax Island
Hugh Hall
Sir Sidney Harmer
Hartz River
Hartz Valley
Heart of Darkness
Herero wars
Hereros
Het Huis te Crayenstein
Sir Clement Hill
Hindu

Hofmeyr post
Hollam's Bird Island
Hottentots
Hout Bay
Hout Bay fishermen
Hypatia
Ichaboe Island
Ilala
H.M.S. Imam
Inaccessible (Island)
Isangila cataract
Island Cock
Jackals

Jacob Rock
Jamestown
Japanese
Jebba
Gustav Jentzsch
Jinja
Johannesburg
R. Jones
Juani
Juba River
Jutten Island
Kalahari Gemsbok National Park
Kalahari police station

Kalahari
Kalk Bay
Kalkfontein
Kaokoveld
Karoo plants
Kasani police camp
Kenya
Kepandiko
Khama's tribe
Khartoum
Captain Kidd
Kigoma
Kimberley

Kimberley (paddle-wheeler)
King William's Town
Kinshasa
Rudyard Kipling
Kirstenbosch
Kisassa
Lord Kitchener
Kokerboom
Komatipoort
Königsberg
Koranna
Korosko
wagons of the kort krink type

Kosi Bay
Krakatoa eruption
Kruger game reserve
Kruger millions
Kruger National Park
President Kruger
Kunene
Kunene River
Kuruman
Kyky
Lady Alice
Ladybrand
Ladysmith

Lake Albert
Lake Nyasa
Alexander Lambert
Lambert's Bay
Lamu Islands
the lagoon at Langebaan
Servy le Roux
Lehututu
Herr Albert Lemke
H.M.S. Leopard
Leopards
Lethlo Pan
Robert Lewis

Liebig's ranch
Liemba
Limpopo
Lion hunters
Lions
Lisboa
Lithops
David Livingstone
Lobito Bay
Loch Ness controversy
London
London Missionary Society
"Lost City" of the Kalahari

Lourenço Marques
Gert Louw
Lualaba River
Luderitzbucht
Luderitzbucht light
Lugard
Lupa River
Lusaka
Lusitania
(constable) Lyons
William Mackinnon
Madagascans
Madagascar

Mafeking
Mahembo
Makoko
Malagas Island
Malays
Maldiv Islanders
Maldives
Malindi
Malindi waterfront
Marco Polo
Marcus (Island)
Margate monster
Maritzburg archives

Arthur Marsberg
Martini's dubious hotel
Masai
Masai country
Matadi
Matadi-Kinshasa
General Mathews
Matopos
Titus Matthys
Maun
Resident Commissioner's house at Maun
Mauritians

"Kalahari" McDonald
Meeuw Island
Melkbaai
Mercury Island
Meresteyn
John X. Merriman
Colonel Meyer
Michelin
Middelburg
Millard
Mkokotoni
Mokwikwi
Molopo

John Molteno
Sir John Molteno
Mombasa
Mombo
Monarwa
Monograms of famous Zanzibar Arabs
Paramount Chief of Ngamiland, named Morimi
Morrell Island
Mossel Bay
Mount Kenya
Mozambique
Mozambique Company

Mpasa
Captain M'Quhae R.N.
Muizenberg
Major H. C. Murdoch
W. Murphy
Murray Bay
Muscat
Mwanza
Namaqualand
Namaqualand coast
Namib
Namib Desert
Napoleon

Narons
Natal
National Botanic Gardens at Kirstenbosch
W. J. Naude
Colonel Naus
New York Botanical Gardens
Ngambo
Ngami
Lake Ngami
Ngamiland
the Niger
Nightingale Island

the Nile
Nizam of Hyderabad
Commander Nolloth R.N.
Port Nolloth
North and South Long Islands
Northern Rhodesia
North-West Cape
Nossob
Nossob River
Nyasa
Nyasaland mission
H.M.S. Odin
Okavango

Okavango swamps
Okavinga
Old Abraham
Old Dutch Medicines
Old Hunter's Road
Olifant's Kloof
Olifant's River
Oman Arabs
Omdurman
Orange River
F. P. van Oudtshoorn
Ovambos
Owen Island

Professor Owen
Pachypodium Namaquanum
Palace of Ink
Palapye
Palapye Road
Diver Palmer
Parsees
Passarge
the explorer Paterson
H.M.S. Pegasus
Pelican Point light
Island of Pemba
Penguin island

Penguin Islet
Persian Gulf
Persian occupation of Zanzibar
Diver Olaf Pettersen
Dirk Philander
Philippine Islands
A. A. Pienaar
Pietermaritzburg
Piscis Rudyardensis
Platteklip Gorge
isle of Plumpudding
Plymouth
Pofadder

Pomona
Ponta Gea
Pontoppidan Report
Port Amelia
Port Elizabeth
Port Nolloth
Portuguese East Africa
Possession Island
Pretoria Museum
Prince Alfred
Prince Charles
Prince Leopold
Prison Island

Pungwe River
the Queen Mary
Queen Victoria
The Quest
Rand Water Board
the Rand
Ras Kisimani
Rehoboth
Colonel Deneys Reitz
“republic” of Rehoboth
Piet Retief's company
Rhodes' tomb
Cecil Rhodes

Rhodesia
Richtersveld
Johan van Riebeeck
Rietfontein
Roast Beef Island
Robbe Islet
Robben Island
Robbenstein Islet
Robert Coryndon
Rocks of the Adamants
Dr. A. W. Rogers
Reverend H. M. Rogers
Rogge Bay

Roman Rock
Rua Conselheiro Castilho
Rufiji Delta
Rufiji River
Saldanha
Saldanha, the Portuguese navigator
Saldanha Bay Islands
harbour of Saldanha
Salisbury Island
Salt River
Sandfontein
Sandwich Harbour

Schapen Island
Mr. B. Scheepers
Professor Ernest Schwarz
Scotia
"Sea" wagons
Seaforth Beach
Seal Island
Sehitwa
Selous
Serpent
Seychelles Islanders
Seyyid Khalid
Seyyid Said

Shangaans
Shark Island
Miss Sharp
Sierra Leone harbour
Silver trees at the Cape
Simon's Bay
Simon's Town
Sinclair Island
Captain Sinclair
Sirondellas
Reay Smithers
General Smuts
Snoek

Soco reefs
Socos Islands
Somaliland
Somalis
Source of the Nile
South African mule teams
South Long Island
South-West Africa
Soviet Russia
St. Croix Island
St. Helena
St. Lucia Bay
St. Lucia lighthouse

Stag Islet
Stanley Pool
H. M. Stanley
Stanleyville district
Staple Reef
Staple Rock
John Steyn
Stoltenhoff
Strand
Sudanese attendants
Sudanese warriors
Suez Canal
Sunbeam

Swahilis
Swakopmund
Syrians
Table Bay
Table Bay Docks
Table Bay fisherman
Table Mountain
Tabora
Tamalakane River
Tanganyika
Tantallon Castle
Taungs skull
Diver H. L. Teifel

Thirstland Trek
Sergeant Thomas
Diver J. F. Thomson
Thousand Nights and One Night
Thunberg the botanist
London Times
Tippu Tub
Tontelboom
Tooth Rock
Trader Horn
Transkei
Transvaal
Trans-Zambesi Railway

Tree Island
Trek-boer
trek-oxen names originated
Tristan da Cunha
Tshane
Tshekedi, the Bechuana Chief
Tumbatu
Turks
Ubangi
Uganda
Uganda Government
Ujiji
Union

Union Forest Department
Union Government
Union Waters
Union's End
University of Capetown Scientific Expedition
University of Cape Town Kalahari Expedition
Uppington
Ushant
Vaal River
Vaalbank dam
Vaal-Hartz canal
Governor Simon van der Stel

Captain van Ryneveld
Mr. P. van Zyl
Vasco da Gama's pillar
Vereeniging
Verneuk Pan
Victoria Nyanza
Queen Victoria
Vigiti Magna
Vila Machado
Vlermuisklip
Von Trotha
Von Veltheim
Vondeling Island

Voordeelspan
Wagonmakers' Valley
Waldeks
Walvis Bay
Mr. E. Warren
Warrenton
Captain Webster
Webster's Kopje
Webster's pool
Wellington
Wesselton
West Africa
Willem

William IV of England
Fred Wilson
Windhoek
Wintersrush
Witdraai
Witwatersrand gold rush
Woodstock beach
Xgon
Lady Young
Sir Hubert Young
Zambesi
Zambesi Jack
Zanzibar

Zanzibar Sultans
Zimbabwe
the Zoologist
Zulu impis
Zululand